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AUTHOR Harris, Roger; Simons, Michele; Bone, John
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ABSTRACT

A study explored the role of the workplace trainer in the building of training/learning cultures in workplaces in Australia. Following a literature review, stage 1 data collection involved observations and interviews in 18 enterprises in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia where trainers were facilitating learning with one or two employees/learners. Five key functions and 32 trainer actions were identified and formed the nucleus of stage 2, a telephone interview survey of 350 workplace trainers. Findings indicated penetration and impact of workplace trainer competency standards were low; informal workplace training was very common; there was a high incidence of trainer actions related to encouraging self direction in learning in employees and structuring and shaping processes to accommodate learning; frequency of many trainer actions in the workplace was significantly mediated by context-specific factors; the majority of trainer actions did not directly match competencies in the training packet; and only very few respondents reported that juggling working and assisting others to learn was not an issue. Learning network theory provided a useful framework for rethinking the role of the workplace trainer. Implications relevant to the National Strategy for VET were concerned with quality of training provision, building a training/learning culture, and further research. (Appendixes include 62 references, instruments, and data.) (YLB)

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Rethinking the **role** of **workplace trainer**

Roger Harris
Michele Simons
John Bone

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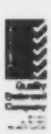

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Executive summary

Training reform in Australia over the past decade has gradually been shifting the balance from a supply- to a demand-driven system of vocational education and training (VET). In the move from off-the-job to on-the-job training, the workplace trainer is assuming an increasingly critical role in the provision of training opportunities. The critical issue is to what extent workplace trainers (especially in micro and small enterprises) are ready, willing and able to meet this enhanced commitment.

Despite the increasingly important role for workplace trainers, there has been relatively little attention paid to them, apart from governmental recognition that competency standards have been required. Such lack of attention has been particularly the case in relation to the small business environment and to the more informal end of the training spectrum. Given that quality of VET provision and building workplace training culture are two key issues in *Australia's national strategy for VET 1998–2003*, the researchers believed that further research was required into the role of the workplace trainer in these processes. This study was therefore based on the two assumptions that quality of training in the workplace depends to a considerable degree on workplace trainers, and that these trainers play a crucial role in the building of training/learning cultures in workplaces.

The research process

The research used an interpretative methodology that combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collecting data. Following an extensive literature review, the data-gathering occurred in two stages.

The first stage involved observations and interviews in 18 enterprises where workplace trainers were facilitating learning with one or two employees/learners. The enterprises were in three industries: information technology (IT), real estate, and building and construction, and spread across three Australian States: New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. A total of 29 observations and interviews was held. The transcripts were coded and analysed with the help of NUD.ist software. From this process, a number of key functions and 'trainer actions' were identified, and these formed the nucleus of the interview schedule for the next stage.

The second stage was a telephone interview survey of a larger sample of workplace trainers, one in each of 350 enterprises across the same three industries and States. The 'working' definition for workplace trainer was 'the person in the enterprise who helps/guides others to learn the things they need to know and do in order to get their work done'. This survey gathered data to complement information from the first stage, particularly focussing on the trainer actions.

The sample of 350 workplace trainers comprised 116 (33%) in building and construction, 126 (36%) in information technology and 108 (31%) in real estate. They were located in 162 (46%) micro, 108 (31%) small and 80 (23%) medium/large enterprises. The interviewees reported a wide spread of experience in working in their particular industry, from one-third having worked for five years or less, to seven per cent for more than 30 years. In fact, 45 per cent (n=156) stated that they were the owner of the business.

Summary of findings

The key findings from the study were the following:

- The penetration and impact of the workplace trainer competency standards are low. In fact, 13 per cent (n=44) of the sample had completed a Workplace Trainer Category 1 course, seven per cent (n=26) a Workplace Trainer Category 2 course and ten per cent (n=34) a Workplace Assessor training course. Only one-third had heard of these competency standards; and only small minorities claimed that they knew a lot about them or that their training practices had been considerably affected by them.
- Work and learning are inextricably interlinked, and shape each other in a dynamic inter-relationship; for example, when trainers structure and manipulate work processes to accommodate employee learning.
- Five 'functions' were identified as central to the role of the workplace trainer: fostering an environment conducive to learning; working and learning with co-workers; structuring and shaping work processes to accommodate learning; promoting independence and self-direction in learners; linking external learning experiences with work and learning in the workplace.
- In addition, 32 'trainer actions' were isolated from the observations and interviews, and then confirmed through telephone interviews with workplace trainers in 350 enterprises.
- 'Informal' workplace training (and learning) is very common, judging from the overall frequency of 'trainer actions' reported by respondents.
- There was a high incidence of 'trainer actions' related to encouraging self-direction in learning in employees, and structuring and shaping work processes to accommodate learning.
- The least frequent 'trainer actions' were those relating to the linking of internal and external learning experiences, particularly that of liaising with external providers.
- The frequency of many of the 'trainer actions' in the workplace was significantly mediated by context-specific factors such as type of industry, enterprise size, ownership of the business and length of experience.
- The majority of the 'trainer actions' did not directly match the competencies in the unit, 'Train small groups', the unit in the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training replacing the former Workplace Trainer Category 1 competency standards.
- Only very few respondents reported that juggling the twin tasks of working and assisting others to learn was not an issue for them. Various strategies are employed in juggling the twin demands of worker and trainer, including working longer hours, planning and prioritising work very carefully, supervising 'at a distance', continual judging of abilities and competence of workers and how these could be matched with requirements of the task at hand, and using other workers to supervise or delegating training tasks.
- There is a range of strategies (as reported by respondents) which can be used to develop the skills of workplace trainers, such as revision of provider curriculum, less formal training opportunities, materials available in the workplace, experiential opportunities in the actual setting with space for discussion with others, and a number of specific ways in which employers could play a role in creating conducive work environments and policies.

Learning network theory provides a very useful framework for rethinking the role of the workplace trainer. This theory conceptualises the workplace as a series of networks, of which two are of particular significance in understanding workplace learning. Work networks are shaped by the nature of the work and the relationships and workplace climate created by the interactions of workers within an enterprise. Learning networks are shaped by the focus of the learning along with the climate and relationships within an enterprise.

In the enterprises that participated in this study, the work network predominated. Work shapes the learning, and the learning network shapes the role of the workplace trainer. In

some cases, the workplace trainer has a key role to play in the learning network, as in the case of a trainer who is part of a human resource department in an enterprise. In other instances, the workplace trainer is a worker and the work structures, processes and content shape and limit the time and energy he/she can devote to facilitating learning. The findings of this study challenge the notion of 'one size fits all', as trainers in different enterprises develop different ways of working.

In small and micro businesses, the workplace trainer, in conjunction with other workers, shapes the learning network that evolves. An effective workplace trainer is aware of the impact of the work network on learning in their enterprise and how the work network can be shaped and reshaped by their actions in supporting learning. The workplace trainer has a key role to play in assisting to alter the 'shape' of work structures, processes, relationships, content and climate to accommodate learning in the workplace.

From these findings, a number of implications relevant to the *National strategy for VET* were derived and were concerned with quality of training provision, building a training/learning culture and further research.

Quality of training provision

The findings raise a number of questions relating to quality of training provision. A substantial amount of training occurring in the workplace is of the 'unstructured', informal kind, particularly in micro and small businesses. For the workplace 'trainers' in these settings, the national competency standards are of only minimal assistance. Firstly, their penetration into such enterprises is low. Secondly, even where trainers are aware of their existence or have completed such courses, the impact of the standards upon their training practices is reported to be minimal. Thirdly, the relevance of these standards to informal trainers, especially in small businesses, is claimed to be slight. The formal competencies are not necessarily the ones used in micro and small business, and are not the complete picture for those training in such settings. In this respect, the findings of this study will be of considerable interest to those undertaking the review and further development of these national competency standards.

Quality of training provision may also be affected by the extent of collaboration between industry and training providers. The data in this study reveal a relatively low level of liaison between workplace trainers and external providers.

The issue therefore raised here is how best to equip workplace trainers (particularly informal ones) with the skills highlighted in this study. The report provides suggestions relating to the nature of provider training, the provision of relevant and high-quality training materials, and the making of spaces for experiential learning, interaction and strategy-sharing in the workplace itself.

Building a training/learning culture

This study also holds important implications for the national policy direction of building a training/learning culture within industry. While national initiatives are helpful in setting overall climate, a training/learning culture is likely to evolve distinctively in each workplace according to the interpretations of its inhabitants and the nature of its networks, rather than through government fiat. Change management indicates that policy initiatives are often filtered and interpreted at shopfloor levels. Thus the role of workplace trainers (as the key figures in the learning network within each enterprise) is critical, as is the catalysing effect of informal training at all levels in an enterprise. This raises the interesting question of whether the culture of training is a VET-driven training culture or an enterprise-evolving training culture.

Given the official definition of training/learning culture (ANTA 1998, p.20), it is the informal trainer who is in the prime position to impact considerably on these elements. It is in these

ways that the informal trainer has a crucial role to play in the development of a learning culture in the small business workplace, which represents 90 per cent of enterprises in Australia.

This study has provided supporting evidence that a considerable amount of informal training, and by implication learning, is occurring in small business although it is largely unrecognised and is not of the structured kind that 'counts' in VET statistics.

There are two important issues here relevant to the building of a training/learning culture. The first is how best to make the hidden world of 'unstructured' informal training more visible so that in some way it can be credited (counted) as training, and therefore recognised and valued as a legitimate form of educational experience. The second is how training/learning can be further encouraged within enterprises.

The study is a reminder to think realistically about what is happening in enterprises in relation to power relations, roles and work networks, and the need to take into account the full context of the enterprise when considering training, since training is often considered on its own and without a context, as if it existed in the same form everywhere. This 'one-size-fits-all' perspective does not match reality, particularly in micro and small business. The nature and extent of the training carried out in enterprises, as reported in this study, underscore the importance of considering a number of contextual factors, including size of enterprise, type of industry, ownership of the business, as well as many other factors (implicit in learning network theory) such as processes, climate and relationships.

Two sets of results, however, are promising for the policy direction of building a training/learning culture in industry. First, many of the highest frequencies of 'trainer actions' were those which reflected the trainers' keen interest in employees' concerns, usually through making time for interaction in daily working life. Second, there was a high degree of encouraging self-direction in learning in the employees. A deeper understanding of how learning of various types occurs within the workplace and a rethinking of the role of workplace trainer both have much to offer those interested in promoting government policy to build training/learning culture(s) within enterprises.

Further research

Further research is needed into how provider-based trainers might best work with the learning and work networks in enterprises to further the goals of the current *National strategy for VET*. An extension of this line of inquiry would be examination of how external bodies influence and shape learning and work networks over time.

Longitudinal studies that 'map' the implementation of VET training initiatives (such as training packages) would provide a valuable opportunity for examining the evolution of learning and work networks over time. Further research could also illuminate the influence of other actors within the workplace in shaping learning and work networks. Another area that deserves attention is the quality of learning networks established in enterprises. Such an exploration of quality could use the dimensions explicated in learning network theory (namely, content, processes, structures, relationships and climate) as the basis for examination.

The use of learning network theory in this study has raised the issue of the tension that always exists between the self-initiated, self-directed learning needs of individual workers and the learning needs of the enterprises in which they operate. More research which examines the degree to which certain types of learning and work networks foster self-direction and autonomy in learners within the workplace would be a valuable undertaking.

There is also a need for an exploration of ways in which informal training/learning in the workplace might be more fully recognised and valued. This would include ways of framing policies to reflect what happens in reality, so people are able to receive recognition for their learning. Finally, an analysis could be undertaken of the extent to which national training

packages have incorporated units of competency relating to workplace training, and the extent to which such units have actually been taken up by enterprises and providers as a reflection of the increasing reality that *every worker is also potentially an informal trainer*.

This research has explored new ways of conceptualising the role of the workplace trainer in an attempt to bring together a more contextually based and holistic view. The findings question generally accepted notions of 'workplace trainer', which tend to be founded on assumptions of formality, structured contexts and large business environments, and based on the premise that 'one size fits all'. The results particularly challenge the national competency standards for workplace trainers, and demonstrate that these standards do not sufficiently accommodate the role of the more informal trainer who, in the normal course of work, helps others learn in the workplace. In short, the study signals an urgent need for rethinking the role of workplace trainers and re-examining policy in this area.

Framing the project

The project and its context

One of the most significant outcomes of the training reform that has taken place over the past decade has been the (re)-claiming of the work site as a legitimate learning environment. Commonwealth Government reform has gradually been shifting the balance from a supply- to a demand-driven system of vocational education and training (VET). In this move to de-institutionalise training, the workplace trainer is assuming an increasingly critical role in the provision of training opportunities. Trends suggest that this shift will become enshrined as a central element in skill formation policies in the near future, as more initiatives seek to achieve the twin goals of making training an attractive undertaking for employers and ensuring that training is relevant and useful for workers.

With increasing responsibility for training being expected of enterprises, and higher value being placed upon on-the-job workplace learning vis-à-vis off-the-job institutional learning, enterprises are experiencing, and will increasingly experience, the pressure for more training. As the political imperative for VET in schools continues, there will also be pressure for more workplace mentoring—as a result of continuing demands for work placements from schools. Furthermore, greater knowledge and awareness of training is required in enterprises in order to make wise decisions concerning training under the policy of 'user choice'.

Part of this swing to on-the-job learning also undoubtedly derives from economic considerations. Governments and employers in this period of tight economic conditions see training on the job as more cost-efficient and more realistic and relevant than sending workers off the job to an educational institution. Thus the off-the-job component of courses, especially at the lower levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), is slowly being de-institutionalised and, in some instances, abandoned in favour of learning occurring totally in the workplace.

The critical issue is to what extent workplace trainers (especially in micro and small enterprises) are ready, willing and able to meet this enhanced commitment and to fulfil this increasingly important role in the Australian economy as it heads into the next century.

Governments (and large businesses) through the 1990s have tended to believe that this issue will be addressed by short courses based upon workplace trainer competency standards. Early in this decade, the COSTAC (1990) report clearly foreshadowed the dilemma in shifting responsibility for training more into the workplace. The Committee referred to 'a major issue arising ... in the workplace, ... the need to develop the skills of trainers' (p.16), and recommended that 'appropriate measures [needed] to be developed to improve the *quality* of workplace training design and delivery, and to improve the skills and status of workplace trainers' (p.17). The Committee's perceived answer was that the (then) 'National Training Board will need to consider the inclusion of training standards' (p.16).

However, although there is considerable faith in these national competency standards, our research on the integration of on- and off-the-job training in the housing industry found that apprentices desired different skills from their workplace trainers from those the trainers were able or willing, in most cases, to provide (Harris et al. 1998). In this housing industry study the workplace trainer, often a small business operator (most closely aligned with the role portrayed in the former Workplace Trainer Category 1 competency standards), facilitated the learning of the apprentices in a manner rather different from that outlined in the official competency standards. The apprentices, reflecting on their experiences of learning,

recommended that training be offered to their workplace trainers and that this training should enable them (the apprentices) to learn a wide range of skills and facilitate the development of attitudes and values which are conducive to learning in the pressured and uncertain environment of small business.

Despite the increasingly important and central role for workplace trainers, there has been little attention paid to these trainers, apart from governmental recognition that competency standards were required. A landmark report on VET research earlier in the decade, *No small change* (McDonald et al. 1993), reported that research on industry trainers was 'sparse', identifying only one study in the area. It concluded that:

> *We know very little about the nature of the training profession in Australia: the backgrounds of trainers, how they got into training, how long they stay, how they are trained (if at all), what training techniques are used and how appropriate these are, and so on ...* (p.38).

Several years on, far more is now known about workplace learning (principally as a consequence of the Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council's allocation of priority to it) and yet there is still precious little known of the role of trainers and particularly the links with quality in VET provision and with the building of training culture(s). Such lack of attention has been specifically the case in relation to the micro and small business environment, and particularly at the more informal end of the training spectrum. Given that quality is one of the issues identified in Australia's *National strategy for VET 1998–2003*, the researchers believed that research was required to explore this issue before quality in VET provision became a serious concern. Moreover, given that the building of a training culture(s) in the workplace is another of the key planks in the national strategy, the researchers considered that such research was critical because of the potentially central role of the workplace trainer in this process.

Review of the literature

The shift in emphasis to learning in the workplace has been driven by three core beliefs (Hawke 1998):

- The system of VET that existed prior to the mid-1980s was not capable of delivering the type of training needed to create a flexible, skilled workforce which could give Australia a competitive advantage in an increasingly globalised economy.
- The nature of the competence required by the workforce to drive Australia's economic development could best be developed in learning environments where real-world activities could be undertaken.
- The cost of increasing the skill level of the Australian workforce to meet these demands was going to be high. In order to achieve the policy goal of a more highly skilled workforce while containing costs associated with VET, ways needed to be found to encourage enterprises to invest in training in the workplace that would lead to formal qualifications.

These beliefs provide the foundation for reforms which have promoted the de-institutionalisation of training, particularly at the lower levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the increasing importance of the role of the workplace trainer. In short, the training reforms have placed great emphasis on the role of workplaces and the personnel in them in providing relevant, contextualised, job-specific learning opportunities in a manner that will contribute to the growing pool of qualified workers in a cost-effective manner.

Enterprises and training

However, the manner and extent to which business has responded to these reforms has not always been in the direction intended by the policy-makers and the response of enterprises to these reforms has been varied. Statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal that almost all large enterprises (those with more than 100 employees) provide training to their employees (Robinson 1998, p.2). Similarly, a large proportion of medium-to-small enterprises also provide training. Small business enterprises, in contrast, supply training in only about 50 per cent of cases. Disaggregation of statistics on training activity in small enterprises reveals further insights:

- Only 45 per cent of micro businesses (enterprises that employ less than five people) have been found to be involved in training (Robinson 1998, p.2).
- About one-quarter of small businesses are involved in training apprentices, trainees or publicly funded management development programs (NCVER 1998, p.5).
- Just under 45 per cent of all non-agricultural small businesses do not have any employees—the benefits of training in these cases are often limited to the sole proprietor (NCVER 1998, p.5).

Today's business environments are characterised by a number of factors such as increased competition and rapid technological change which, theoretically, should act to motivate a greater investment in training. What researchers have noted, however, is a decreasing expenditure in training. Between 1993 and 1996, employers' expenditure on training, as a percentage of gross wages and salaries, fell (Misson 1998, p.3). It should be noted, however,

that when small businesses do invest in training they spend substantially more. Field (1997, p.7) comments that this might be because:

- small businesses, unlike large ones, are much more reliant on training and skills, and
- what small businesses claim as training may be due to 'accountants who are good at claiming lots of expenses under the "training" heading'.

The decision to become involved in the business of training is complex and one of only a number of responses that an enterprise could make in order to meet its needs for skilled labour. Billett and Cooper (1997) identified a number of different types of investment that enterprises could make in relation to training. Enterprises could:

- purchase skilled labour from the marketplace and invest in informal on-the-job training
- employ apprentices or trainees and make a contribution in terms of wages and support for off-the-job learning and the provision of on-the-job training
- provide specialist training to develop workforce skills by sending employees to training programs provided externally to the enterprise or internally by a consultant and/or
- provide in-house training via the use of in-house human resource experts and trainers

A partial explanation of how training is viewed by enterprises and what might encourage an investment of training is provided by human capital theory (OTFE 1998). Within this theory training is viewed as an investment. Training will take place when the return on the investment justifies the costs associated with providing training. Hence the level of training provided by an enterprise depends upon factors which affect the costs and benefits of training.

Human capital theory can help also to unravel the type of training in which enterprises are likely to invest. Enterprises are more likely to invest in training that will make the employee more valuable to that enterprise. In other words, enterprise-specific skills are valued more highly than generic skills which can make an employee more vulnerable to poaching. In some ways, this last point is in direct conflict with some of the current VET reforms which emphasise portability and the value of training to individuals. These characteristics can be seen to be in direct competition with employers' interests.

There has been extensive research on the barriers and factors that affect enterprises' approaches to investing in training. There has been particular attention paid to small businesses, which have been a focus of training policy in recent years (Gibb 1997, p.17). The most significant factors noted in the literature are enterprise size, lack of understanding of formal VET provision, specialisation and location.

Size of enterprise

Size of the enterprise can result in quite different levels of investment in training. Larger enterprises, not surprisingly, tend to make a larger investment in training than do smaller enterprises. This lower level of investment in formal training in small enterprises can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- the greater concentration of jobs with lower skill requirements in the small business sector (Baker & Wooden 1995)
- a greater tendency for small business to focus on short-term goals (Robertson & Stuart 1996)
- the routine nature of a large proportion of the work which does not require high levels of skills or the need for up-skilling or multi-skilling (Field 1997)
- an over-reliance on the external labour market to provide skilled labour requirements (Baker & Wooden 1995)
- some small businesses competing on the basis of low cost and flexibility rather than customer service and quality with subsequent implications for the types of skilled labour employed by the business (Field 1997)

- managers/owners not able to determine training needs or outcomes (Catts 1996) or provide on-the-job supervision (Robertson & Stuart 1996)
- approaches to recruitment which show a preference for already skilled, mature workers rather than unskilled younger people (Field 1997)
- the part-time and non-permanent nature of employment in small business and the high numbers of women who have difficulty attending structured training (Field 1997)
- a lack of experience with training which otherwise may have exposed business owners to the benefits of training
- the perception of small business that the formal training system is not able to provide relevant, specific and immediately applicable training in a cost-effective and timely manner (Coopers & Lybrand 1994; Industry Taskforce on Leadership and Management Skills 1995)
- the lack of incentive for workers to undertake training. In many small enterprises the internal labour market is either very limited or non-existent. There is little opportunity for career advancement or enhanced job prospects (Cabalu et al. 1996)

Coopers and Lybrand (1994) noted that the tendency for small business to train employees increased as the number of employees and the annual turnover of the business increased. They also highlighted the fact that employers did not often see training as a solution to their problems. They tended to label training as 'too theoretical' and 'not immediately applicable' and hence not worth the investment.

Lack of understanding of formal VET provision

Guthrie and Barnett (1996) noted the lack of understanding within enterprises about formal training and how courses are accredited. Misko (1996), investigating work-based training in a range of enterprises, identified that few used government incentives for a range of reasons, including:

- a lack of awareness of the incentives available
- the bureaucratic and inflexible administrative processes needed to obtain the incentives
- the perceptions that the incentives did not really take into account the needs of enterprises

Specialisation

Those enterprises whose focus coincides with an area of VET provision (for example, childcare) are more likely to utilise the public system and make a lower contribution to the skill development of their employees. Small businesses whose focus lies outside mainstream VET provision are more likely to use alternative means to train their employees, such as the use of informal and unstructured approaches to training (Billett & Cooper 1997, p.12)

Location

The location of enterprises will also influence the decision to invest in training. Difficulties in recruiting trained workers to rural and remote regions may make it necessary for employers to train existing workers. Conversely, costs associated with travel and time away from the business may affect decisions to invest in formal training programs away from the work site.

Overall, the literature on investment in training suggests that, the larger the enterprise, the more likely training is to occur. Smaller enterprises are more likely to use the labour market to meet their skill requirements rather than invest in training. It is also important to note that the most common form of training reported by enterprises is informal, on the job and unstructured. This approach to training is the most difficult to quantify and measure and, for this reason, is often undervalued. It is, however, growing in importance and degree. Its value is recognised within the current learning climate which promotes notions of the learning

organisation (Senge 1992) and continuous improvement in enhancing quality and competitive edge in the global marketplace, and supported within the current business climate of economic rationalism that demands cost-cutting and efficiency.

Informal learning in the workplace

The nature of learning taking place in a workplace varies widely (Hager 1997, p.9). Learning can be associated with formal training programs that may or may not result in some form of credential. As Candy and Matthews (1998, p.4) note, this tends to be associated with the use of experts (trainers) who play a leading role in transferring the required knowledge and skills to workers. However, the workplace is also a site for informal or incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins 1990; Hager 1997). Research evidence points to the value of both types of learning in the workplace and to the importance of achieving a productive balance between the two (Hager 1997, p.9).

Research has also shown that, while the workplace has distinctive advantages as a learning environment, there can also be drawbacks, particularly in small enterprises (Billett 1994, 1996a; Harris et al. 1998). The goals, methods, ideals and strategies of business enterprises are very different from those of learning institutions. The former is concerned with productivity and survival, the latter with learning and professional growth. Thus the enterprise (especially small business) is not primarily concerned with learning and, in particular, with learning that might lead to qualifications which could be recognised on the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Smith (1997) examined some of the myths associated with training in small enterprises and concluded that the enterprises are often very committed to training, but they rely on *different types of training* from those which have been promoted in VET policies and by VET providers. In contrast with large enterprises, training in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) tends to be informal, firm specific, undertaken on the job and related to day-to-day operations (Seagraves & Osborne 1997, p.47). Fundamentally, it is learning *through* work, where learning is integrated into doing the job. This type of learning contrasts sharply with learning *for* work, which is usually associated with vocational training and can occur at any number of sites (for example, a TAFE institute), and learning *at* work, which is often referred to as learning which is undertaken at work but removed from the work site (for example, training provided off the job but in house by the training department or an external consultant) (Seagreaves & Osborne 1997).

The learning environment that exists in an enterprise, particularly a SME, provides a context where learning is embedded in work. Observation reveals one set of behaviours. This hides two streams of activity—one associated with getting the job done, the other with learning (Scribner & Sachs 1990). This form of learning is distinctive because it:

- is task-focussed
- occurs in a social context where status differences can exist between workers and there are often clear demarcation lines between groups of workers (for example supervisors or the business owner and other team members/employees)
- often grows out of an experience such as a problem, crisis or novel event
- occurs in an environment where people receive remuneration for their work

(Retallick 1993; Billet 1994, 1996a)

In small or micro businesses, learning is very often facilitated on a one-to-one basis. The 'training' is frequently unplanned, unscheduled, unrehearsed and spontaneous, often in response to a crisis or problem, and therefore often intuitive (Vallance 1997, p.120). The character of this training is shaped by the absence of dedicated training staff, and often undertaken by the person(s) nearest the crisis who usually has little or no training expertise (Hawke 1998). Smith (1997) notes that learning often occurs in informal and non-traditional

ways and is very dependent on time and the operating context in which the enterprise finds itself.

In many respects learning in the workplace is quite rigorously structured. It is framed by the features and structures of the work and the work practices in which the learning is embedded (Onstenk 1995). Scribner and Sachs (1990) describe the learning process as one of 'assimilation', where the learner/worker is gradually brought into ongoing work practices and 'normal events' of the workplace in a manner that ensures that the job gets done. The learning might require some re-organisation of work practices. It is often underpinned by a particular flow of communication and can sometimes be group rather than individually focussed. Group members 'teach' each other and integrate their skills and knowledge in order to enhance the collective competence of the enterprise (Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin 1994; Sorhan 1993; Lyons 1989). It can also involve challenging previously held practices and beliefs and acknowledging tacit assumptions and beliefs that shape approaches to tasks and issues (Marsick 1987; Marsick & Watkins 1990; Harris et al. 1998). Customs, habits, attitudes, the way individuals respond to mistakes and problems, the degree to which questioning and time for explanations are tolerated—all of these frame the learning and shape how the person(s) designated as trainer/mentor might approach the task of helping workers learn their jobs.

Many of these key ideas examining the link between work and learning have been brought together in overseas research. The work of Van der Krogt and his colleagues (1998; Poell et al. 1998) in examining network learning theory is particularly instructive because it seeks to reconcile:

- the tensions inherent in attempting to balance the needs of the workplace with the needs of workers in their dual roles of employee and learner
- the co-terminus nature of learning and work and the manner in which one shapes the other
- the various modes of learning that can take place in a work environment and the relationships between these different modes and the institutional structures that support them

This theory rests on the following key ideas.

- The concept of 'network' is understood in a particular way.

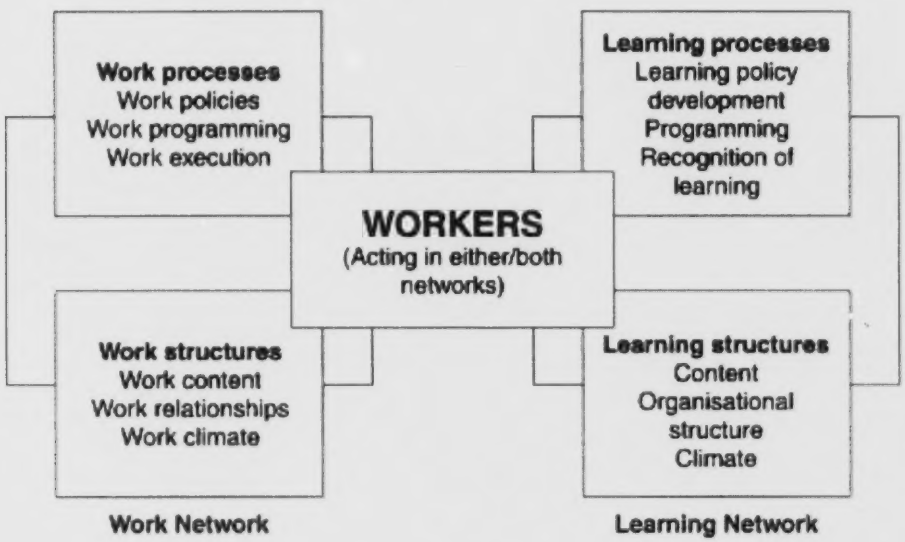
  An enterprise is made up of a series of networks that are internal to the enterprise. These networks correspond to the main functions that the enterprise needs to undertake in order to remain viable and could include, for example, a human resource network. These networks (and therefore the enterprise) are constantly being shaped by the actions of workers ('actors') within these networks. The manner in which the workers act is dependent upon their position within the organisation and their action theories (Argyris & Schon 1978). The structure and shape of the organisation evolve over time through the action of the workers. Furthermore, the organisation itself is located in an environment that is part of any number of networks. These networks, through the actions of the 'actors' within them, act on an enterprise to shape its responses to a range of issues including the way in which functions such as training for workers might be organised and implemented.
- In understanding workplace learning, two networks are of particular importance—the learning network and the work network.

  The work network evolves out of the ways in which workers interact with policies and organise and work within an enterprise. Work networks are also shaped by the nature of the work and the relationships and climate created by the interactions of the workers within the organisation.

  Similarly, the learning network comprises the results of workers acting on policies and planning and developing ways of recognising the learning that takes place. The focus of learning (that is, the content), along with the organisational climate and structures, contributes to the 'shape' of the learning network.

Both the learning and work networks are created and re-created over time. The actions of the workers and the structures within an organisation act on each other and shape the networks that emerge over time, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: The learning and work networks



Source: Van der Krogt 1998, p.163

- Different types of organisations are characterised by different learning and work networks

  Within different types of enterprises, a certain form of work pattern is dominant. This work pattern is visible in the way work is undertaken and is constructed over time by the actors in the network.

  In a similar way, key workers (actors) shape the structure of the learning processes (learning policy development, programming and recognition of learning) and create a learning network. It is important to note that Van der Krogt specifically states that the 'learning structures' refer to both formal programs (offered internally and externally) *as well as* the informal and incidental learning which occurs in the course of work.

By examining the nature of the learning that takes place in enterprises, Van der Krogt (1998) identifies four different types of learning systems:

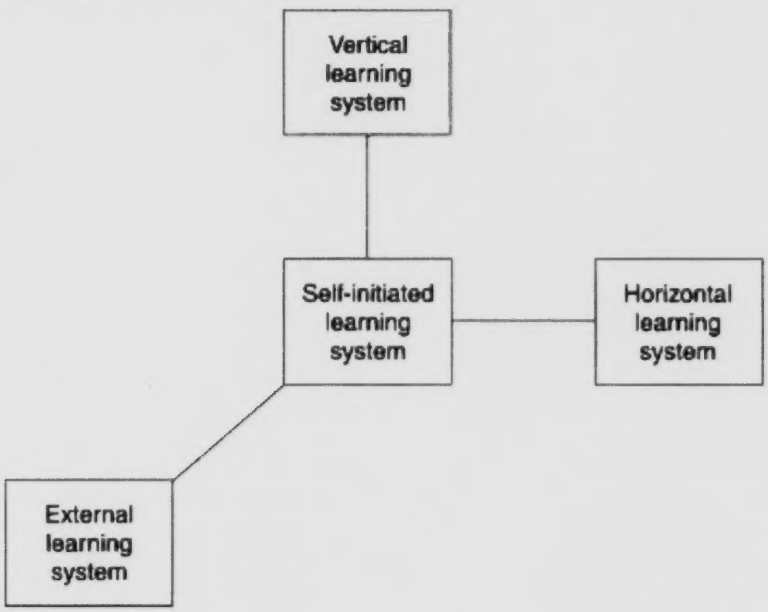
- Self-initiated learning systems (referred to by Van der Krogt et al. as 'loosely coupled') allow the learner the freedom to organise his/her learning. Learners' interests and needs are of paramount importance.
- Vertical learning systems encompass learning that is underpinned by structural supports which exist inside the enterprise, such as needs identification, training plans, use of trainers, human resource departments etc.
- Horizontal learning systems emphasise learning that occurs where people establish groups as a basis for implementing learning programs.
- External learning systems emphasise learning that is predominantly driven by external contacts such as professional associations, institutes, outside consultants or, in the case of many enterprises in Australia, public and private training providers. They establish the

content, processes etc. for the learning system, which are then implemented within the enterprise.

A learning network then can be conceptualised as a three-dimensional space that consists of these learning systems (see figure 2). It is important to note the positioning of the worker/learner-initiated learning system and that this system is 'held in tension' with the other learning systems. Put simply, network learning theory recognises that a tension will always exist between the needs and learning goals of the individual and those of the enterprise. Learning systems exist through the actions of workers and in reality do often fit in with the work system in which they are embedded. They, nonetheless, develop and change according to the actions of the people within them and can, at times, put the needs of learners before the needs of the enterprise.

Network learning theory offers valuable insights, which can be used to explore the role of the workplace trainer. The person acting as a workplace trainer is a key actor within the learning network and potentially can facilitate learning within any part of the three-dimensional space of the learning network. The action of the workplace trainer within the learning network is open to shaping by the work network of which he/she is also a part.

Figure 2: The learning network



Source: Van der Krogt 1998, p.168

Managers/supervisors and their role in supporting learning in the workplace

As noted above, the learning and work processes within an enterprise provide a powerful framework which shapes how a person who helps others learn their job might operate. Only in some instances is this person able to view their role as a learning facilitator and, in many cases, the task of training is juggled with other work responsibilities. Only rarely will they have formalised knowledge and skills to enhance their performance in this role. These observations are particularly pertinent for those persons who are managers/owners of enterprises or supervisors charged with the responsibility of assisting others to learn in the workplace.

The literature on learning in the workplace points to the influence which managers and supervisors have in relation to the nature and extent of learning that might be promoted in enterprises. In a study of small businesses in Queensland, Catts (1996) noted the success of training was largely dependent on the support from owners and managers. A number of studies have also highlighted the preference of small business owners and managers for specific types of training and, in particular, a preference of informal learning from a variety of sources (Kilpatrick & Crowley 1999; Field 1997).

The extent to which managers and supervisors can devote time to supporting and promoting learning in their enterprises is also shaped by the demands of their own work roles. In many instances managers are responsible for a wide range of functions (for example, marketing, finances, industrial relations) in addition to the task of hiring and training staff. This broad range of tasks can leave little time for issues relating to learning and training (Hughes & Gray 1998, p.11). Australian research examining enterprise training also notes the trend for training to be devolved to line management in recent years (Smith et al. 1995, p.15). This trend, when combined with the increasing pressures on management to ensure optimum production and quality, often results in a decreased commitment to the benefits of training and a reluctance to release employees for training.

In a study of the experiences of apprentices in on- and off-the-job learning environments, Harris et al. (1998) notes the critical roles played by the workplace trainers who, in this study, were also the owners of small businesses. These owners shaped the climate in which the apprentices learnt and played a vital role in determining what was to be learnt and under what circumstances this learning was to occur. Apprentices in this study were clear that workplace trainers need a wide range of skills including highly developed communication and conflict resolution skills. They also needed particular personal attributes (for example, the ability to deal sensitively and productively with unexpected events and mistakes made by other workers) if they were to foster learning successfully (Harris et al. 1998, p.201). Other studies have also noted gaps in the abilities of managers/owners to determine training needs or outcomes (Catts 1996) or provide on-the-job supervision (Robertson & Stuart 1996).

The workplace trainer

Policy-makers and governments, as part of the implementation of training reform, recognised the importance of ensuring that learners in workplaces should have access to, and support from, suitably qualified workplace trainers. One of the first sets of competency standards to be developed in the early days of training reform was for workplace trainers (CSB–Assessor and Workplace Trainers 1994). The purposes of the development of these standards was essentially practical, focussing on assisting those responsible for hiring and training workplace trainers (Garrick & McDonald 1992). These standards have received widespread support with the process of their development involving 'five hundred organisations, government bodies, ITABs, industry trainers, teachers and private individuals' (Competency Standards Body–Workplace Trainers cited in Peak 1992). These standards have undergone further refinement and are now contained within the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training which was released early in 1999.

Critical research informing the standards, both in their early development and their later translation into the training package, has been limited. These standards have been based upon assumptions about training and the training role which, while noted, are still yet to be seriously questioned. The standards are underpinned by a 'skills deficit notion' of training which is more reminiscent of institutionalised approaches to skill formation (Garrick & McDonald 1992, pp.176–7). They appear to lack any real links with emerging ideas such as the learning organisation (Senge 1990; Bawden 1991) or the body of knowledge which emphasises learning embedded in daily work practices and occurring in an informal or incidental manner (Marsick 1987; Marsick & Watkins 1990; Harris et al. 1998).

The recently released Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training is interesting for its attempts to recognise that training (and hence learning) does occur in a variety of

settings within the workplace. A unit entitled 'Train small groups' has been included in the revised standards to replace the previous Workplace Trainer Category 1 qualification. This qualification was specifically designed for those who, during the course of their work, are asked to train work colleagues.

This unit conceptualises the workplace trainer's role as one where the trainer is 'in control' of training ('specific training needs are identified', 'training objectives are matched to identified competency development needs', 'practice opportunities are provided', 'readiness for assessment is monitored'). This is further underscored by the almost overwhelming emphasis on training rather than learning; that is, the unit assumes that the learning that results from training is predictable, explicit and has outcomes which can be determined in advance. A structure is imposed on the learning and the focus is clearly on individual workers/learners in isolation from their work environment and their work colleagues. In contrast, an emphasis on learning embedded within the work of the learner within the unit of competence would alter the positioning of the workplace trainer in relation to those learners.

The unit, 'Train small groups' is also remarkable in that it bears distinct similarities to another unit within the training package which focusses on the competencies required to deliver training sessions as part of a training program. It therefore raises questions about the *specific* competencies that a workplace trainer whose training role sits alongside their role as a worker may need to develop.

A recently conducted review of the competency standards for workplace trainers and assessors (Gillis et al. 1998) reveals some related issues of interest including:

- data suggesting that the national standards are largely being ignored in the development and delivery of training for workplace trainers and assessors
- serious doubts about the levels of awareness and use of the standards in the assessment of competency for the training of workplace trainers and assessors. In many instances, providers of training for assessors and trainers appear to use pre-packaged materials as a basis for training programs with little or no reference to the standards

The authors conclude:

> *The users' endorsement of the existing standards and the widespread implementation of training programs based on alternative curricula and competencies, together with a worrying level of apathy with respect to the training and assessment competency standards, [were] noted ...*

Apart from methodological issues which might be raised in relation to this study, it is perhaps feasible to conclude that one factor contributing to the apparent non-use of these standards (and, in particular, the Category 1 standards) might be their lack of relevance to persons who in the course of their work are asked to help colleagues learn. In many respects the standards reflect more of an attempt to legitimise moving the work of a trainer or teacher from an off-site environment such as a TAFE institute to the workplace, than an attempt to capture the complexity of encouraging and supporting learning in an authentic work environment. This finding perhaps signals a need to reconceptualise the role of the person who, in a workplace setting, assumes the task of supporting colleagues in their learning.

People who choose or are asked to work with a newer or less experienced worker may not necessarily alter their pattern of work in any significantly *visible* manner. But they nonetheless undertake the task of guiding the learning of others using direct skills such as modelling, coaching, scaffolding and fading (Billett 1996b). Indirect guidance could also be used to facilitate learning, including the provision of opportunity for less experienced workers/trainees to observe other workers, and to listen and talk with them (Harris et al. 1998).

In some respects, this role appears to share some similarities with the process of mentoring which is characterised by facilitated learning undertaken when a more experienced person works with a less experienced co-worker to provide support, advice, skill development and guidance (Wallis 1997; Coombs 1997). The relationship is structured in 'common territory' (in

this case, the work environment) and is subject to change as the territory is shaped by the contingencies of work.

A number of authors have identified groups of behavioural functions that characterise the mentoring relationship (Cohen 1995; Tovey 1997). Within workplace learning settings these include:

- building relationships which lay the foundation for the exchanges that will accompany the learning/work stream;
- sharing information and demonstrating skills which both facilitate the workers' goals and aspirations and meet the needs of the business;
- facilitating and fostering workers' self-reflection and thinking about the role within the business, their interests, abilities and beliefs;
- challenging workers' actions, beliefs and decisions;
- modelling self-disclosure and acting as a role model;
- demonstrating and fostering vision and innovation.

Within these functions, skills such as those identified by Billett (1996b) might be evident, underpinned by micro skills such as explaining, questioning, guiding, linking, cueing, reflecting, correcting (Tovey 1997). Insights from examining apprentices' learning on the job also suggest that the workplace mentor may also alter the 'anatomy' of work to emphasise components of a job or task in order to help the learner grasp its integral parts and their inter-relatedness (Harris et al. 1998; Scribner & Sachs 1990). The extent to which these functions and skills are evident and different from those embedded in the workplace trainer standards forms a central focus for this study.

The research process

This chapter details how the research team carried out the project. It presents the research questions, and outlines the research and its decision-making in terms of three stages. It also includes descriptions of the respondents who participated in the research.

Methodology

The research sought to answer some fundamental questions regarding the role of workplace trainers/mentors in industry, particularly micro and small business, in the contemporary industry training climate which has seen a major shift in emphasis from off-the-job to on-the-job training. The questions posed by the research team at the start of this project were:

- How are the twin roles of business operator and workplace trainer/mentor conceptualised and reconciled in practice?
- What knowledge, skills and attributes are required by workplace trainers/mentors in these enterprises? How do these compare with the competencies that are embedded in the (former) Workplace Trainer Category 1 standards?
- How might these competencies be developed?
- What structures and policies will be required to ensure this occurs?

These research questions were addressed using an interpretative methodology which combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collecting data. An interpretive approach allows the development of a picture to 'get a better fix on the subject-matter at hand' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p.2)—in this instance, how training in the workplace was being construed and constructed by workplace trainers. While objectifying research processes gather data which seeks to make generalisations on recurring characteristics from human experience (Garman 1996), qualitative research processes are concerned with exploring meanings that humans develop and place on their worlds. In the researchers' view, combining these two approaches enabled the clearest and most robust interpretation, particularly when one evolves from and complements the other.

The research process consisted of three interrelated stages: project preparation, visits to enterprises and telephone interview survey.

Stage 1: Project preparation

This first stage set the direction for the project and prepared the way for the research process. It involved the following sequential steps.

- The researchers negotiated the co-operation and support of the national and State industry training advisory bodies (ITABs) of the industries selected to participate in the study. Both national and State ITABs were involved in the research processes and provided valuable support and assistance in terms of introducing the researchers to specific companies and providing industry information.

- A small project advisory group was established in Adelaide and consisted of representatives from the ITABs of the three industries included in the study (see appendix A). This advisory group met with the researchers periodically throughout the project to provide advice and feedback to the research team.
- A literature review was undertaken to provide a context and a sound theoretical basis for the study.
- Appropriate ethics and protocol approvals were obtained for the study. These included ethics clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Australia and statistical clearance from the Statistical Clearing House of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- A web page was established within the web site of the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work (CREEW), with links to the three SA ITAB web sites. The web page provided the project title, contact person and contact details, background to the project, research focus, methodology in four stages, and an invitation for anyone to provide comments on the project by emailing the contact person.

Stage 2: Visits to enterprises

The second stage was to involve observations and interviews in a selected number of enterprises (small, medium and large) where workplace trainers were facilitating learning with one or two employees/learners. During these visits, the role of the researchers was to:

- audiotape interactions wherever possible, particularly 'critical moments'
- maintain detailed observation notes to capture the flow of events while shadowing the workplace trainers
- conduct semi-structured interviews with the workplace trainers after the observations

One of the most significant issues along the path of this research was how to define exactly who was the subject of our inquiry. Terms describing the function of the person we were interested in observing and interviewing are somewhat problematic and open to very different interpretations. The notions of 'trainer', 'mentor', 'coach', 'facilitator' and others all invite varying connotations, a situation which continued to create difficulties for this study whenever we attempted to describe the project to others in different contexts. We therefore wrestled for a long time with language that seemed inadequate for prescribing and describing this person who is not designated a 'workplace trainer' but is more of an 'informal mentor'. The 'working' definition we employed for the purposes of this research was: 'the person in the enterprise who helps/guides others to learn the things they need to know and do in order to get their work done'.

At a national conference when the researchers discussed this issue of terminology, a delegate encouraged us to use the word 'trainer' because on the industrial shopfloor that is the term most commonly used and understood. The research team therefore decided that in this report we would use that term, while recognising that the *informal* trainer was the key subject of inquiry.

Another key issue was exactly how to investigate such informal training processes. The keeping of detailed notes during observations required some form of structure in order to maintain consistency in observation across enterprises (particularly if more than one researcher was to undertake observations) and to establish a foundation on which to build the subsequent interview. For this purpose, an observation schedule was developed for this study. The interviews were designed to follow up significant aspects observed in the shadowing process. An interview schedule was also therefore developed.

These observations and interviews were planned to include a cross-section of industries across three States. As a result of discussions with the project advisory group, the following three industries were chosen for this fieldwork.

Information technology

This industry was chosen because it is a relatively new and growing industry which experiences rapid change. It is made up of a few large and many very small dynamic companies which, it was believed, would face unique challenges in employee training not experienced to the same extent in the other industries. This industry was particularly recommended by InfoComP, the national ITAB sited in Victoria.

Real estate

The real estate industry was chosen because there is no well-established industry pre-service training. Most training is undertaken on the job and conducted by peers or immediate managers. Also, because of the way in which real estate agencies operate, it was felt that the pressures of work-related duties would be particularly relevant to trainers with trainees. This particular industry sector was chosen in collaboration with Business Skills Victoria.

Building and construction

Building and construction was chosen because it was seen as an industry with a more 'traditional' approach to training than the other industries and therefore had the potential to reveal how companies are reacting to the shift from off-the-job, TAFE-centred training to on-the-job, workplace-centred training.

Composition of the sample

For each industry, enterprises were selected from South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. A sample of 18 enterprises was chosen, six enterprises in each industry. The selection was spread across the three States so that six companies—one large, two medium and three small—were observed in each State. Table 1 gives the breakdown of enterprises by State, industry and enterprise size.

Observations and interviews

For each enterprise a researcher arranged with management to visit the work site and observe an employee with his/her trainer. The researcher used an observation schedule (see appendix B) to record the actions of the trainer as well as the interaction between trainer and employee. Where possible, and where permission was granted, verbal interactions were recorded on audiotape.

Following these observations, either immediately or on a subsequent visit, the trainers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix C).

Where it was not possible to schedule observations, additional interviews were held with training personnel, especially in the larger companies, with mentors and, in a few cases, with employees/learners. One site could not be included because of difficulties in obtaining a suitable company. However, a total of 29 observations and interviews were held over a period of two months at 18 sites.

Because of the nature of informal, on-the-job training and, especially because of the imperatives of small business, it was not possible to observe informal training in all instances. This was compensated by in-depth interviews with on-the-job trainers and learners. Although this produced data on reported rather than observed behaviours, there is good reason to believe that the reported behaviours do reflect actual behaviours because, where behaviours were observed, they closely matched reported behaviours.

Table 1: Distribution of enterprises for observations and interviews by State, industry and size of enterprise

	Industry			
	Small	Medium	Large	**Totals**
South Australia				
❖ Information technology	1		1	2
❖ Real estate	1	1		2
❖ Building & construction	1	1		2
New South Wales				
❖ Information technology	1	1		2
❖ Real estate	1	1		2
❖ Building & construction	1		1	2
Victoria				
❖ Information technology	1	1		2
❖ Real estate	1		1	2
❖ Building & construction	1	1		2
Totals	**9 (3 of each industry)**	**6 (2 of each industry)**	**3 (1 of each industry)**	**18**

Wherever possible, interviews and training episodes were audiotaped and then transcribed. There are therefore basically three sources of data:

- ❖ transcripts of interviews with workplace 'trainers'
- ❖ transcripts of training episodes
- ❖ researchers' field notes on observations of sites and notes made on the contexts written up after each visit

The subjects

The interviewees were those who had a role (to varying degrees) in training others. In the small companies these interviewees were usually the managers or owners of the business. In the building industry, the trainer tended to be a qualified tradesperson who was a self-employed sub-contractor. This was true both of the small companies and the large organisations that relied on sub-contractors to undertake their apprenticeship on-the-job training requirements which were organised through the Housing Industry Association or State apprenticeship scheme.

In the real estate industry, in the larger organisations the trainer was invariably the local office manager, and in smaller companies the owner–manager. In the IT industry, the trainer tended to be either the owner–manager of a small organisation or a peer of the employee being trained, chosen for his/her expertise in a particular skill or knowledge area. Only in the large organisations was on-the-job training undertaken by dedicated trainers, those specifically employed for the task. One large IT organisation had a highly developed training department, in which the training manager had responsibility for both managing training activities for the client public and internal employee training.

The research team was confident that the sample covered a wide range of training arrangements that would reflect the range of circumstances that pertain in industry today.

The circumstances and environments for observations and interviews

The circumstances of the observations varied depending on the industry and its size. In the building and construction industry, observations were carried out on site. Because of the ambient noise, weather and other considerations, data from these observations included the observer's notes and impressions of actions and behaviours of the trainer in the training episode. Verbal exchanges between trainer and learner were usually kept to a minimum. The trainer usually assumed that the learner was competent at the trade skill which would have been previously learned at TAFE. The skills imparted on site were organisational and workflow skills.

In the real estate examples, the observer frequently recorded the verbal exchange between trainer and learner as sessions were usually on a one-to-one basis. Real estate learners were taught by their trainers using in-house schemes or Real Estate Institute course materials as a foundation for the learning. In IT, mentoring episodes sometimes included more than one learner and were more of a group mutual-help session or work planning session. Again, here, the observer's notes were used to record the exchanges between trainers and learners. In both real estate and IT, observations were made at 'Monday morning group planning sessions'. These sessions were a mixture of project review, work planning, 'pep talks' and training. They were a rich source of interchange between experienced workers and new(er) employees and entailed a considerable amount of on-the-job training. One large IT company had a 'work shadowing' scheme in which a less experienced worker shadowed a senior employee for a day. The debriefing meeting for this exercise was observed and the senior employee later interviewed about the experience. Follow-up interviews were either scheduled immediately after the observation session or held later. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed. These sessions yielded a rich source of data in the form of the researcher's notes and transcriptions of tapes.

Data analysis

The data in the form of verified transcripts were coded and analysed with the help of NUD.ist (Non-numerical Unstructured Data-Indexing, Searching and Theorising) software using categories which had emerged from the themes in the text. This process was iterative, taking advantage of the flexibility of NUD.ist to feed emerging themes and nodes into the data.

Analysis of the text was a slow process as the conceptualisation of the 'index tree' evolved from close reading of the transcripts. A provisional coding system was developed from the literature and from a close reading of some of the scripts. Points of departure in the coding system were noted as each script was analysed and coded. These points often led to coding revisions. In this way, the coding system was modified as new phenomena emerged and agreement was sought from each of the three researchers. Using three researchers was our way of checking for validity and consistency of interpretation, and it also served as a check for any data that may have been overlooked. From this process, 32 statements were identified as 'trainer actions' taken in these enterprises, and these formed the nucleus of the interview schedule to be used in stage 3.

Stage 3: Telephone interview survey

The third stage focussed on a telephone interview survey of a larger sample of enterprises across the same three States. This survey aimed to gather data to complement the information from the observation/interview stage, particularly focussing on the 32 trainer actions. Other

data were gathered on characteristics of the trainers. The telephone interview schedule is in appendix D.

The telephone interviews were conducted using the MS CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system of the Marketing Science Centre at the University of South Australia. The interviews each lasted an average of 12 minutes and were conducted during normal business hours with a random sample of enterprises drawn from the Desktop Marketing Systems database. Trained interviewers conducted all interviews and the data collection process was monitored to ensure the quality of the data collected.

For each industry in each State, it was planned to interview a trainer in 18 micro enterprises (defined as less than six employees), 12 small enterprises (6–20 employees) and 12 larger enterprises (more than 20 employees). In this way 126 enterprises in each of three States would be surveyed, making a total of 378 enterprises. In reality, larger enterprises were difficult to locate in the building and construction, and particularly the real estate industries, and interviewers were taking an inordinate amount of time tracking down such businesses. Therefore, to save time and money the decision was made to cease the telephoning earlier than planned. Consequently, 350 interviews were actually completed, one in each enterprise, with a person selected by the enterprise to match the following description given by the interviewer.

> *We are conducting a survey about people who, for part of their job, have some responsibility for training the people they work with, usually as on-the-job type training. It's usually more informal training and might involve working with apprentices, trainees or employees who are new or less experienced and who need some assistance in learning more about their job. Have you been involved in this sort of training?*

The data were then analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The survey respondents

Table 2 shows the breakdown of the respondents by industry and size of enterprise.

Table 2: The sample by industry and size of enterprise

Size of enterprise	Industry	N	%
Micro	Building & construction	54	15
(<6 employees)	Information technology	54	15
	Real estate	54	15
Small	Building & construction	36	10
(6–20 employees)	Information technology	36	10
	Real estate	36	10
Medium/Large	Building & construction	26	7
(>20 employees)	Information technology	36	10
	Real estate	18	5
Totals		**350**	**100**

In the total sample of 350, there were:

- Building & construction 116 respondents 33%
- Information technology 126 respondents 36%
- Real estate 108 respondents 31%

and

- Micro 162 enterprises 46%
- Small 108 enterprises 31%
- Medium/large 80 enterprises 23%

The researchers' aims, therefore, of obtaining approximately equal proportions across the three industries, and of focussing particularly on micro and small business—while not ignoring medium and large business—were largely achieved. The intended (although to a large extent unpredictable) focus on seeking 'informal' workplace trainers was also largely achieved. Only seven reported words associated with training or human resources in their job titles.

The interviewees were also asked which of the following statements best described their role as a workplace trainer in the enterprise in which they worked (table 3).

Table 3: Statements that best describe the interviewees' role as a workplace trainer

Can you tell me which of the following statements best describes your role as a workplace trainer in the enterprise you work in?	n	%
I am required to act as a workplace trainer because it is written into my job description	29	8
I an expected to train other employees but it is not something that is written into my job description	65	19
I train other employees because it is something that I think is part of my job	178	51
I train other employees because they ask me for help	78	22
Totals	**350**	**100**

This table provides an indication of the self-reported rationale for training fellow workers in the workplace. Only eight per cent claimed that they were required to act in this capacity because it was written into their job description. The remainder was involved in training for other reasons. The latter two categories in particular are noteworthy, not only because together they form almost three-quarters of the responses, but also because they reflect a genuine interest in and commitment to helping others learn. While these categories are not mutually exclusive of the first two statements, they do nevertheless furnish some important data on motivations that may have implications for the incidence of workplace training and the development of training/learning culture.

The interviewees reported a wide spread of experience in working in their particular industry. One-third had worked for five years or less, 18 per cent for between 6–10 years, 27 per cent for 11–20 years, 14 per cent for 21–30 years and the remaining seven per cent for more than 30 years. In fact, 45 per cent (n=156) stated that they were the owners of their business, reflecting the deliberately high proportion of micro and small enterprises in the sample. Breakdown by enterprise size revealed that, of the 156 reported owners, 66 per cent were in micro, 25 per cent were in small and only six per cent were in medium/large businesses. Again, cross-tabulation by size revealed that 66 per cent of respondents in micro businesses reported themselves as owners, 36 per cent of those in small enterprises and only 13 per cent of those in medium or large businesses. Categorising the respondents by industry showed that 54 per cent in building and construction were owners, with the equivalent proportions in real estate

being 44 per cent and in IT 37 per cent. This relatively high figure for building and construction is not unexpected given that this industry is characterised generally by a high degrees of micro business and sub-contracting (Smith et al. 1995, p.19; Harris et al. 1998, p.26)

While the sample was, in general, experienced in terms of working years, the proportion which had had exposure to workplace trainer courses was relatively small. Only 13 per cent (n=44) had completed a Workplace Trainer Category 1 course, seven per cent (n=26) a Workplace Trainer Category 2 course and ten per cent (n=34) a Workplace Assessor training course. However, these small proportions are not unexpected given that the researchers were specifically seeking the more 'informal' workplace trainer rather than the formally trained person dedicated as 'trainer'. When asked whether they had completed other train-the-trainer type courses, 32 per cent (n=113) replied in the affirmative. Within this third, there were some significant differences by industry. This third included 43 per cent of the real estate respondents, 36 per cent of the IT respondents and only 19 per cent of the building and construction respondents. The low figure for the building and construction industry is contrasted by their having the highest proportion completing the recognised Workplace Trainer Category 1 course (although the numbers were small and differences by industry were not statistically significant). There were no statistically significant differences in these types of training between owners and non-owners.

It was somewhat surprising, however, that only one-third (34%, n=118) had ever heard of the competency standards for Workplace Trainers and Assessors. Of these 118 respondents, 36 per cent were in building and construction, 34 per cent in IT and 30 per cent in real estate. These 118 respondents had heard about the competency standards from many different sources, both inside and outside their workplaces and from private reading (table 4).

Table 4: Sources of information on workplace trainer competency standards

Where did you hear about these competency standards?	n	%
In a training course at work	22	19
In a meeting at work	6	5
From other people in the workplace	23	19
From a training course outside of the workplace	24	20
From reading a trade magazine or journal	22	19
Other	21	18
Totals	118	100

While one-third of the sample had heard of these standards, more than half (52%, n=61) of these interviewees claimed that they knew 'only a little about them', and over another third (37%, n=44) knew only 'something about them'. So while a number of respondents in the sample declared they *had* heard of these competency standards, only 11 per cent (n=13) could say that they knew 'a lot about them'. Moreover, of the one-third who had heard of them, the extent to which the competency standards had influenced the way they trained employees in their workplace was minimal. Only 18 per cent (n=21) claimed that their practices had been affected 'considerably' and another 18 per cent (n=21) 'to some extent', but 26 per cent (n=31) said 'only a little' and 38 per cent (n=45) 'not at all'.

These figures are revealing, and somewhat surprising, given that the workplace trainer competency standards (in their various versions) had been in place nationally for a number of years and, as one of the key cross-industry sets of competency standards, have been a central plank in policy initiatives to recognise training in workplaces. Even allowing for the fact that these interviewees were training informally, the knowledge about and completion of the (former) Workplace Trainer Category 1 competency standards, which were specifically designed for those who trained only as a part of their job, was very minimal. The very low

impact that these standards had had on training practice among those who had completed train-the-trainer courses was particularly startling. These data do support other research such as that completed by Gillis et al. (1998) relating to the relatively low penetration of these standards through business and industry.

Having described the research process and provided a detailed description of the research participants, the next three chapters of the report focus on the data collected in stages 2 and 3 of the study.

Findings

Workplace trainers and their work contexts

One of the key themes to emerge from the literature examined in this report is the co-terminous nature of learning and work; that is, work and learning exist as a single stream of activity where the learning activity shapes how the work is done and, conversely, work shapes the learning activity. The literature also suggests that informal learning is a key component of the overall learning effort that occurs in the workplace. These key themes suggest that the role of the workplace trainer will be:

- embedded in, and shaped by, the work environment in which they are located
- not confined exclusively to structured learning events such as those supported by human resource departments within enterprises, external providers or other enterprise training programs

This chapter of the report examines these twin foci through the work of a number of workplace trainers who were observed and interviewed about their role in their workplaces.

Enterprises from the building and construction industry

Respondents from the building and construction industry were employed in a number of learning contexts that varied according to the size of the enterprise in which they worked. Those that were employed in large enterprises appeared to have roles that were quite highly structured. The training they provided to workers was often part of a systematic program of training implemented by the enterprise to achieve specific goals.

For example, one workplace trainer employed in a large construction company described his role within the context of a large project which aimed to establish a company-wide training program. Motivated by the goal of improving safety in the workplace, the company undertook to deliver training and assessment to approximately 600 people working on a large development site in metropolitan Melbourne. Because the workers had 'different needs' there were 'various stages in the training project'. The first stage involved the use of 'training matrices, performance analyses and work team needs' to determine what skills were available among the staff. The second stage involved the trainer assisting the company to determine what 'they needed' and finally making decisions about the way those needs could be met using a variety of delivery mechanisms.

The enterprise contracted to work with a large publicly funded registered training organisation (RTO) to deliver some of the training. This was complemented with distance education materials for some areas of learning. The workplace trainer managed both of these initiatives. In order that the enterprise build a 'partnership', and as part of their goal of engendering a 'training culture', the trainer was also involved in the development of a range of formalised training programs. In-house trainers who had completed the Workplace Trainer Category 1 qualification delivered these programs. Supervisors who had been trained as workplace assessors were responsible for on-the-job assessment to recognise the current competencies of workers.

The training program established within this enterprise was highly structured. The enterprise provided a range of underpinning supports for the training system including needs identification, the development of training plans and the development of in-house personnel

to deliver training and assess the workers. This approach to training was characterised by the workplace trainer as 'a bit of a hierarchy'. This hierarchy was intended to support the way work was organised, with supervisors and leading hands who exercised oversight of the work undertaken on site playing a leading role in the training and assessment.

The RTO contracted by the enterprise significantly influenced the content of the training program. The emphasis on credentialled learning shaped how the enterprise organised its own human resources in terms of training assessors and other workplace trainers. The enterprise was also keen to ensure that their needs were met. The workplace trainer described how he worked with the training provider to 'modularise ... and drag out the skills that we wanted, customise it to the needs of the job, and had them [the training provider] accredit it'.

Apart from this very structured approach to training, the workplace trainer also acknowledged that 'informal' training exerted a strong presence within the enterprise and that it was 'non stop' and therefore not able to be quantified. This approach to training, however, was viewed more as a backdrop to the formalised training system and did not occupy a great deal of this workplace trainer's attention during the interview. The only exception to this was a reference to those occasions when he was involved in 'toolbox meetings' where learning was 'legitimised'. These meetings would be facilitated by the workplace trainer or other senior personnel and focussed on reviews of workplace practices and procedures in discussion with the workers.

This description of a workplace trainer's role in a large enterprise contrasted sharply with that supplied by respondents employed in small and medium-sized enterprises. In these contexts, there was a heavy reliance on sub-contracting as their primary means of labour supply and workplace trainers had, as a result, established different approaches to their training role.

In many instances the designated workplace trainer was also the owner of the business. They worked on site, usually in dyads or in small groups. These groups were comprised of different types of workers including other tradespersons, labourers and usually an apprentice. The apprentice was normally under some form of contract of training that involved on- and off-the-job training, the latter usually with a TAFE provider. The workplace trainers usually did not maintain any contact with the off-the-job training provider, apart from that learnt by talking with their apprentice.

In this context the trainer described their work as a trainer using a variety of verbs including 'explaining', 'telling', 'showing' and 'guiding'. Communication within the trainer–apprentice dyad or small group was a crucial component of the trainer's role as well as 'working with' the apprentice. Where an apprentice belonged to a group training scheme, pairings of tradespersons and apprentices for the purposes of learning were continually taking place as apprentices moved from tradesperson to tradesperson according to the dictates of the scheme or the availability of work required. Where a group training scheme was involved, the trainers' approach to their work and the task of training was shaped, to varying degrees, by the external contact with the group training scheme. The trainers acknowledged the reality that a contract of training underpinned the employment arrangements between trainer and apprentice and placed expectations on them and the sorts of work environment they were expected to maintain for the apprentice. There was a clear expectation that training should be given some priority on the work site. This required that the workplace trainer not only give careful thought to how a job might be done, but also the way in which work might be made conducive to the apprentice's learning. The manner in which training was delivered, including the content of the training, however, was left almost entirely to the discretion of the employer.

The dominant preoccupation of the workplace trainer in these environments was 'the work' and the tension that always existed between 'getting the job done' and 'educating' the apprentice. The interviews with these workplace trainers were notable for their *absence* of 'training talk'—references to objectives, demonstrations, assessment were not made. Rather, talk was punctuated with references to the development of the apprentice as a tradesperson and the continual trade-off between work practices that accommodate the apprentices'

learning and the benefits that accrue to the enterprise if an investment is made to train rather than 'use' apprentices as 'cheap labour'.

Enterprises from the real estate industry

Workplace trainers from the real estate industry shared some common approaches to training with their counterparts from the building industry. They also utilised a number of external providers to support learning in their workplaces. All the trainers in this study were employed in enterprises which were either involved with the industry's traineeship program or were supporting the learning of colleagues who were attending training programs offered by external bodies, including industry professional associations. These programs and their accompanying materials and assessment systems shaped both the objectives and approaches of the workplace trainers. When trainers spoke of their involvement with such programs, their talk was characterised by references to 'objectives', 'assessment' and 'signing off on assessments' suggesting that many of the competencies embedded in the workplace trainer standards were an integral part of their role.

What was distinctive about the learning in all the enterprises was the use of self-initiated and self-directed learning approaches and the role that workplace trainers took in supporting staff in these endeavours. For example, one trainer (who was also manager of the business) stated more than once that 'it's [the traineeship] really driven by the trainee. The trainee has to drive it'. This refers to the fact that the trainee has to work through the training modules from the program alone before working with the trainer and, on some occasions, with other staff in the business. In other instances, trainers referred to staff deciding to attend professional development seminars and training programs offered by external organisations which were aligned with individual staff learning needs.

These approaches are perhaps not unexpected, given that much of the work in the real estate industry relies on staff working largely on their own, managing a portfolio of properties or a particular aspect of real estate business. But it was also quite evident from the observations and interviews that self-initiated learning was supported within these enterprises by the workplace trainer deliberately bringing learning opportunities to the attention of staff or encouraging staff in their efforts to learn together as a group.

In some of the larger enterprises, groups of learners were paired with more experienced workers (usually the workplace trainer) in a formalised mentoring process. A trainee could seek out assistance or the trainer would offer advice, support and assistance not only with issues related directly to a training program, but also with broader issues such as industry 'intelligence' and information that would generally assist them in their work. These learning dyads were often expanded and reconfigured as the need arose. For example, a trainee in one enterprise was working through a module on trust accounting. The workplace trainer suggested and facilitated the trainee to work with another member of staff who had expertise in this area.

In another instance, the trainer supported the entire staff in undertaking some 'informal' staff development where individuals and groups of staff viewed the latest David Malouf video and then shared their learning from it with each other. Once again this was an example of the workplace trainer utilising informal opportunities arising in the workplace to initiate and support learning.

Enterprises from the information technology industry

Workplace trainers in the information technology industry worked in an environment predominantly shaped by the project-based nature of their work. One respondent was a software development manager, a role which consisted of acting as a team leader to a group of six workers. In this context learning was integrated with work processes. The team met regularly to discuss ways of improving their work. Through these discussions the manager

was able to identify 'ongoing training activity' that was linked to 'how ... we need to go in terms of improvement'. The training program was described as one of 'continual learning' driven by the learning needs that emerged from the work of the team. The program was led by the manager but based upon the group learning together.

Training also occurred on a one-to-one basis. This type of training was described as 'totally informal' and linked to the quality assurance processes within the enterprise. The manager would work with an individual to examine their progress on a project or review their work at the end of a project. This process offered opportunities to suggest alternative ways of tackling problems or improving the outcomes of projects. It also became 'a point for some skill transfer'. The process was presented as highly interactive and dialogic with the manager and worker presenting alternative points of view in order to 'bring some other ideas and skills across'.

A number of IT enterprises also established formal mentoring programs. In these cases, the workplace trainer did not play an active role in the mentoring process apart from occasional assistance to establish a mentoring partnership within a team. Once a mentor has been allocated to a worker, the process is then largely left to the dyad to follow up with each other as they see fit. On occasions the workplace trainer 'encouraged ' the mentor to 'follow up with the person they're mentoring'. This 'formalised' mentoring program could be developed across the organisation (often with the assistance of the human resource department in the case of a larger organisation) or within specific work teams. The degree of formality could also vary. In some instances contact with the mentor and worker was recorded and charted. In other instances the process was highly informal, with little attention paid to the amount of contact occurring between the mentor and worker, the process appearing to proceed in an ad hoc and purely voluntary manner.

One workplace trainer who worked in a large IT enterprise (with over 150 employees) described the role of the trainer as one where he 'worked closely with the human resource manager'. This trainer made an effort to 'get around to all the staff' to determine 'what sorts of challenges they've got' and to 'map' this onto the expectations the enterprise has for the staff. This process is then used as a basis for prioritising training needs. In another instance this trainer described efforts to work one-on-one with an employee which involved 'identifying a bit of a reading plan ... and an action plan ... and reported back to me on how [he/she] was going'. This trainer also described a number of other training activities such as undertaking research collaboratively with staff, making visits with staff to 'other centres' and debriefing sessions. Meeting with colleagues and work shadowing were also mentioned as other forms of learning activity that the trainer facilitated for staff.

Another workplace trainer from a large enterprise described approaches to training which were integrated components of the organisation's overall quality strategy for the organisation. The trainer used 'training matrices' and 'courses' to develop the competencies of workers. This organisation also made use of training offered by external providers such as TAFE, supported staff to travel overseas and continually offered 'internal' training courses for staff in response to the need to deal with 'the changing roles of technology'.

Contrasting learning–working contexts

Each of the workplace trainers involved in this study supported the development of ways of learning that were clearly shaped by the nature of the work undertaken by the enterprise. Approaches to facilitating learning in the workplace were also determined by factors such as the pace of change in relation to technology, the demand for quality assurance processes and the degree to which the enterprise had been able to foster links and collaborate successfully with training organisations external to the enterprise.

There was clear evidence of highly structured approaches to training across each of the three industries. Needs assessment, establishing training programs (or negotiating with external providers to deliver programs), and assessment of competence were key components of their

role. Within these learning systems it was apparent that the role of the workplace trainer involved many of the competencies described in the workplace trainer standards. But it is also clear from the interviews and observations that this was not all that the workplace trainer role encompassed.

All workplace trainers, to varying degrees, worked with staff to shape opportunities for learning that 'emerged' out of the work systems established within the enterprises. Groups of people were brought together to learn from each other in largely unstructured ways through discussion and sharing of work products and processes. This group learning often occurred as part of the normal process of work, but did not appear to be bound by any of the more formalised training structures such as needs identification. Learning needs and issues appeared to emerge idiosyncratically from the work being undertaken at a particular point in time.

One-to-one learning also featured highly in the workplace trainers' descriptions of their work. Quite formalised processes such as company-wide mentoring programs could underpin this type of learning. It could also emerge out of the everyday work of the workplace trainer in his/her dealings with co-workers. In this instance, work practices appeared to be 'moulded' to take into account the learning needs of workers. 'Fitting learning into work' appeared to be deliberate strategy which workplace trainers undertook as part of their role. Work organisation took into account the needs of the learners. Job processes were structured so that a less experienced worker could be assisted to tackle tasks or parts of tasks that they could manage. Close monitoring of the work, feedback and assistance from the workplace trainer facilitated the processes of learning and work.

These analyses reveal that the work of the workplace trainer is comparatively complex. Workplace trainers reported facilitating learning across a continuum—from quite structured systems of training established to meet specific individual and enterprise needs to informal approaches supporting the learning of individuals and groups in response to needs emerging from the daily work processes within the enterprise. This incidental and informal learning was often almost 'unquantifiable' but when examined in depth, revealed the important role that workplace trainers can play in fostering a learning climate within enterprises and the support they can provide to establish workers as self-directed learners.

These analyses also reveal that in many instances the task of facilitating learning is not separate from the day-to-day work of the enterprise. Workplace trainers manipulate the structure of work to accommodate learning in quite deliberate ways. The necessity for learning determines the way in which work is done and the communication and interpersonal relationships that underpin it.

The next chapter of this report analyses in more detail how this facilitation of learning occurs in the workplace.

Functions and actions of the workplace trainer

Functions of the workplace trainer

From the descriptions of the work undertaken by workplace trainers and the observations in workplaces, it is possible to identify a number of functions central to the role of the workplace trainer. Within structured learning systems in enterprises, workplace trainers prepare for, deliver and review training using a range of competencies prescribed by the current workplace assessor and trainer competency standards. It is also clear that these standards only describe part of their role, particularly for those workplace trainers where training is only one small part of their overall work. Trainers' descriptions of their work suggest a wider range of functions. These functions support learning that complements training and development undertaken by workers away from the workplace. Workplace trainers also support the development of informal and incidental learning systems within enterprises. They encourage workers to learn in groups and support approaches to learning such as mentoring. Workplace trainers also foster and encourage self-initiated and self-directed learning for workers.

Fostering an environment conducive to learning

Trainers were very aware that the workplace environment plays a significant role in supporting learning and they spoke about actively cultivating relationships with and between workers as a key component of their work. These relationships were evident in the communication systems built and maintained by trainers. Almost all trainers noted the importance of communication skills in their role. Communication was the main vehicle for training and the primary mechanism through which an environment that supported and encouraged learning was maintained This form of communication was not often characterised by 'training talk' (that is, talk about objectives, assessment, demonstrations and other concepts associated with more formal approaches to training).

Trainers spent large amounts of time talking to workers about the work they were doing. Discussions took place at almost any time during the working day and in a variety of environments, such as the car on the way to and from various work sites, at lunchtime or as they worked together on a task. These discussions formed the basis of decisions about the type of work that the worker might undertake. They provided opportunities for trainers to understand the experience of work from the worker's perspective. Trainers used discussions to show how tasks could be done or what they would like workers to do. These discussions offered opportunities for trainers and workers to explore alternative ways of tackling parts of a job or for the trainer to demonstrate connections between events and tasks to assist the worker in the process of transferring learning to new or novel situations.

The trainers were also very aware that the manner in which they worked and communicated with workers was predicated on a number of attributes, which they believed were important if learning was to be supported in the workplace. Some of these attributes were:

- patience

  ... you have to have a lot of tolerance and know that people are paced differently ...

- honesty

  ... but it's also that ability, that degree of honesty, you have to have that extra ability to get other people to talk about themselves ...

- respect

  ... ability to accept people as they are, and accept their skill level, and not be judgemental or critical about anyone's current skill level, just accept that's where they are at, and that we want to move on from there.

- a willingness to share the work space and their knowledge with others

  I think it's just the willingness to spend the time with you and the willingness to share ... the enthusiasm for the whole thing basically ...

- compassion and empathy

  There's that ability for them to have the confidence that they can come over, not a shoulder to cry on but if it gets too much for them to cope ... you'd call that empathy I suppose ...

- confidence

  A good mentor can't be arrogant. A good mentor has to be confident but accepting of other people.

Working and learning with co-workers

Many of the workplace trainers in the study held jobs where training was not the major part of their work. In most instances, the trainers worked alongside the workers they were training. Alternatively, they worked in jobs that had a supervisory component. The 'work worlds' of the trainer and the workers they were training were inter-related, this connection therefore shaping the teaching processes used by the trainers. The ability of the trainers to interact with workers within this learning–work system was a critical component of their role.

Trainers spoke of shared experiences such as attending events together, telling 'war stories' and working alongside workers. They also networked and built relationships with other workers and people external to the business or the chapter of the enterprise with which they were most immediately involved. These networks and contacts often provided help with issues or problems, or provided input about changes that could be made to work practices or other issues within the enterprise. Other workers or external contacts provided learning opportunities for all the workers connected with the business. Trainers used words such as 'collaboration' or 'sharing' when describing these learning and working situations.

> *Everyone in the office has some degree of skill in a particular field, so we try to develop that because it helps them feel useful and it reinforces what they think they know, or perhaps what they don't know. So we've all learnt something out of this as we've gone through ...*
>
> *If the learner has something or she sees a memo and she thinks [someone else] will learn something from that, she will actually go and get it and throw it on my desk, or go through it with me instead of keeping it all to herself ...*

Structuring and shaping the work processes to accommodate learning

The work of many workplace trainers is an integral part of their primary work roles within the enterprise. The *nature* and *structure* of the work within the enterprise, therefore, is a critical factor shaping the learning that takes place. The workflow, patterns and structure are the developmental pathway (that is, the curriculum) which the trainer uses.

Many of the trainers spoke about the ways in which they manipulate the flow, structure and content of work in order to assist the less experienced workers to learn as they work. The trainers believed that they did this in a number of ways, including:

- altering the pattern and pace of work to make space for learning

  I let the natural flow of the day, in terms of the interruptions from telephone calls and meetings and those sort of things, take place and to a certain extent, when something comes up of value, I think to explain why I am doing it ...

  It's just a regular thing, need to grab [the learner]...for 10 minutes or whatever and go through something that might have happened or something that I think [he/she] is interested in ...

- making judgements about the balance between the work and learning needs

  You can't spend too much time; you can't spend all day trying to show them one thing, you've still got to keep on moving. So it's a bit of a skill in actually trying to make someone move as well as doing the right thing.

- monitoring the work flow and quality of work as learning and tasks proceed

  We have a team leader sort of process and the team leader is the person who organises the work ... and they might sit down and work through what a person needs to do before they actually do it. They sort of transfer the key information but then let them go away and actually do the work and monitor what is actually going on.

- sequencing the order of work tasks to match the needs/abilities of the workers

  We went over her particular job role and thought about starting points for her, you know, obviously leaving tasks where there was a greater degree of difficulty to later on in the week ...

- reconciling the experience from on- and off-the-job learning environments

  ... flexible in terms of being able to see where the curriculum as such meshes in with the day-to-day activities, which is what [the trainer] is able to do, because quite often we'll be out and [the trainer] will say 'oh, that's in the section that we were doing the other day', so he can relate theory with the practical.

These activities assisted the trainer to draw the learners they were working with into the patterns of work. They also helped trainers to connect tasks in a manner that facilitated 'getting the task done' alongside the task of helping others to 'learn their job'.

One trainer also made a distinction between giving work to learners that is 'valuable work' (that is, work that makes a contribution to the business) and 'learning work' which allows the trainer to *guide them, teach them, show them*. This idea, confirmed by other workplace trainers, suggests that they are also involved in the task of making judgements about the sort of work that is most likely to support the learning goals of workers. In the building industry, for example, sub-contractors would refer to jobs without tight deadlines or budgets as providing good opportunities for workers to learn various aspects of their work. Meetings, review sessions and activities associated with quality assurance or occupational health and safety often also provided examples of work which could be singled out by workplace trainers as particularly conducive sites for learning.

Promoting independence and self-direction in workers

As stated previously, many of the workplace trainers in this study had a number of responsibilities within their enterprises, apart from their training roles. It was therefore important that they encouraged and fostered independence and self-direction in the workers. Negotiating tasks, workloads and learning goals, as a prelude to organising work patterns and structures, were important tasks for the trainers. In this way they could allow workers to proceed with the work and free up the trainer to attend to other issues.

Independence and self-direction for workers was also fostered by trainers through activities such as:

- encouraging workers to share their expertise with others in a variety of settings such as meetings
- discussing tasks and asking workers to evaluate their work performance
- providing feedback and encouragement to workers

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- challenging workers to *help them find the answer for themselves* or to find new and different ways of working or tackling problems arising in the workplace

  [The learner] visit[ed] a couple of centres where [he/she] could get some information, de-briefed in that and then undertook to make another couple of appointments on [his/her] own and gradually just started to work more independently on those activities …

  … challenging them to go that bit extra in learning or whatever. So it wasn't just to be listening to them and giving them the good news, but every now and then being able to say, 'Look, it's time you took on a new challenge, it's time you swapped roles or did something different …'

Linking external learning experiences with work and learning in the workplace

Workplace trainers who were working with external providers of training programs, particularly those which involved contracts of training, reported that their role also involved liaison with these providers on a range of issues. Trainers were also aware of the important role they played in supporting workers to integrate their learning from sites other than the workplace. In a few instances, this function required workplace trainers to speak with external providers to provide feedback, negotiate alternative assessment tasks or report progress against competencies achieved.

In other circumstances, the workplace trainer might discuss the training the worker was undertaking outside the workplace and look for opportunities where work practices might be modified to accommodate these learning experiences. One trainer spoke about discussing the requirements of an external training program—how it did not fit with the practices of the enterprise:

… I don't know that I necessarily agree with [a section in the training program] because that's not really your job …

In this instance the trainer went on to explain to the worker why this practice was not acceptable, thus encouraging the worker to reconcile two apparently differing perspectives he/she had encountered in his/her learning.

These data provide support for the argument that the role of the workplace trainer is broader and more complex than might be suggested in descriptions embedded in documents such as the competency standards for assessors and workplace trainers. The data indicate that the role of the workplace trainer is shaped by the work of the particular enterprise and that the work of the trainer is embedded in the work of the enterprise. The work is the curriculum that the workplace trainer adopts and adapts to suit the needs of the workers.

These data also emphasise the important role workplace trainers can have in initiating and supporting the informal and incidental learning occuring in the workplace. They can also play a potentially important role in supporting workers to become independent and self-directed learners.

Actions of the workplace trainer

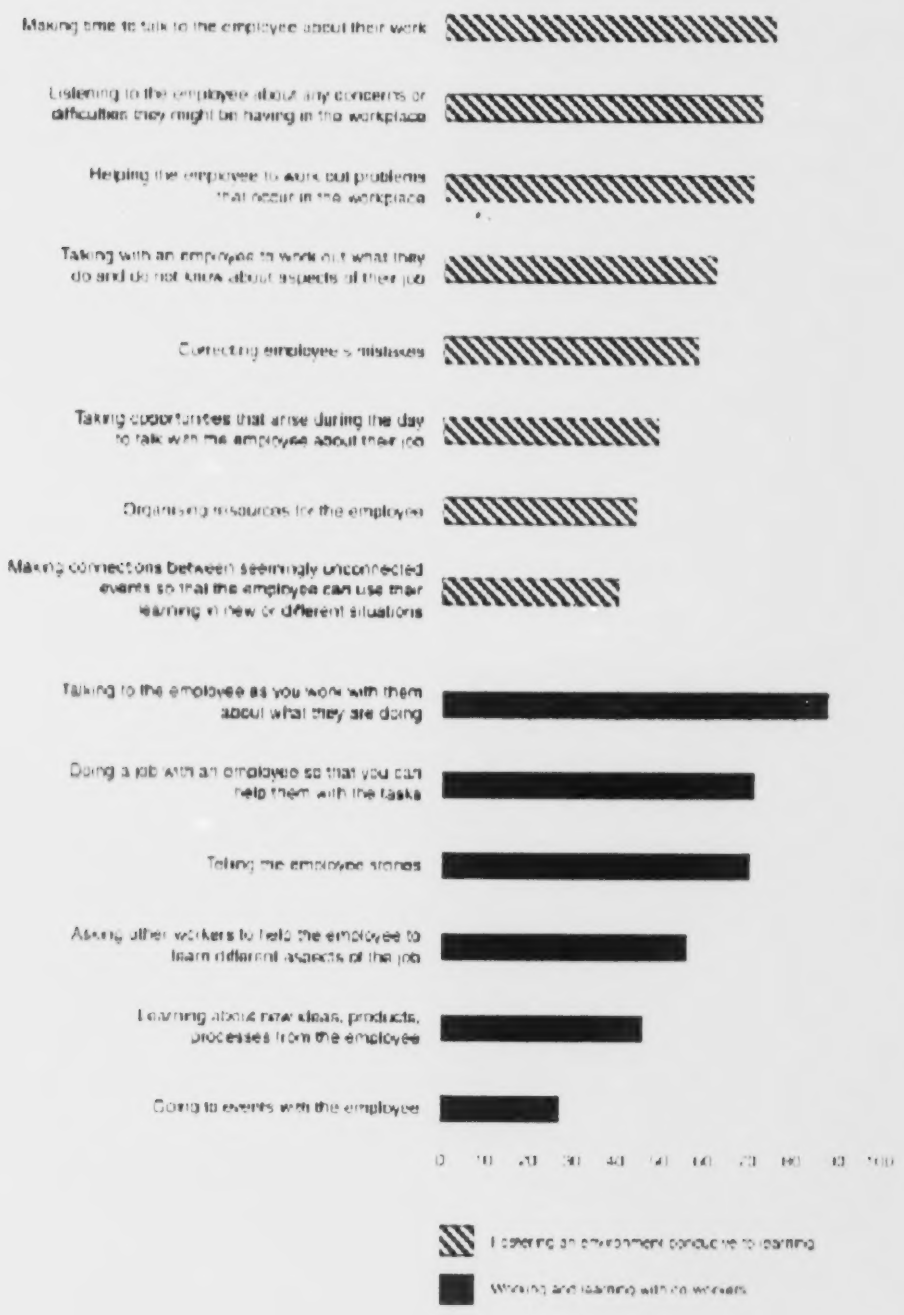
The frequencies of the 'trainer actions' emerging from the first phase of this research are presented in figure 3 (with data in appendix F). They are clustered into the five functions described above.

The data show that all of these trainer actions are reported to be present in the workplace and the great majority are very common. In fact, 11 were taken 'often' or 'very often' by more than two-thirds of the trainers, 22 were taken this frequently by more than half of the sample, and all but four were taken frequently by more than one-third of the respondents. Only one trainer action was used 'often' or 'very often' by less than 20 per cent of the respondents. Moreover, there were few responses in the 'not applicable' category, indicating that these trainer actions were indeed present in the workplace.

A number of more specific observations can be made about these findings (figures in parenthesis are the percentages taking these actions 'often' or 'very often').

- Many of the highest frequencies were those which reflected the trainers' keen interest in employees' concerns, usually by making time for interaction in daily working life. These included talking with employees while working with them (88%), giving feedback and encouragement about work performance (78%), making time to talk to them about their work (75%), encouraging them to share their knowledge and expertise with other workers (73%), listening to their concerns and difficulties (73%), doing a job with them to be able to offer assistance (70%), telling them stories (70%) and helping them work out problems that occur in the workplace (70%). These actions tend to be the more effective behaviours that help to build confidence, boost self-esteem, promote communication, increase motivation and generally encourage informal learning.
- The data reveal a high degree of encouragement of self-direction in employees' learning. Giving feedback and encouragement about work performance (78%), encouraging them to share their knowledge and expertise with others (73%), encouraging them to take on more difficult and complex tasks over time (65%), coming to agreement with the employee about activities to assist them to learn (59%), encouraging them to self-evaluate work performance (55%) and challenging them to explore new or alternative ways of doing things (55%) were all taken 'often' or 'very often' by well over half of the trainers.
- The three trainer actions relating to the linking of internal and external learning experiences received low frequencies (19%, 27% and 27%). These (together with a similar action, going along to events with the employee, 27%) were by far the least frequent of the 32 actions, particularly the act of liaising with external providers.
- Comparatively low frequencies were reported for two of the more formal trainer actions—organising resources for employees (44%) and working out learning goals with employees (38%). Correcting employees' mistakes, another formal action, also recorded a relatively low frequency (58%) compared with other trainer actions.
- Arguably, the most striking aspect of these data, however, is the extent to which workplace trainers structure and shape work processes to accommodate employee learning. These actions include monitoring workflow and quality (79%), organising work so they can be given tasks to tackle on their own (76%), managing the flow of work to help them learn (71%), planning the structure of work so they are able to join in and work at a level best for them (66%), organising work so they are able to tackle a variety of tasks (65%) and making judgements about balance between the need of the employee to learn and the need to get the job done (64%).

Figure 3: **Percentages of employees taking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often' when working with individuals or small groups of other employees learning in the workplace (clustered by function)**


Making time to talk to the employee about their work
Listening to the employee about any concerns or difficulties they might be having in the workplace
Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace
Talking with an employee to work out what they do and do not know about aspects of their job
Correcting employee's mistakes
Taking opportunities that arise during the day to talk with the employee about their job
Organising resources for the employee
Making connections between seemingly unconnected events so that the employee can use their learning in new or different situations
Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing
Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks
Telling the employee stories
Asking other workers to help the employee to learn different aspects of the job
Learning about new ideas, products, processes from the employee
Going to events with the employee
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Fostering an environment conducive to learning
Working and learning with co-workers

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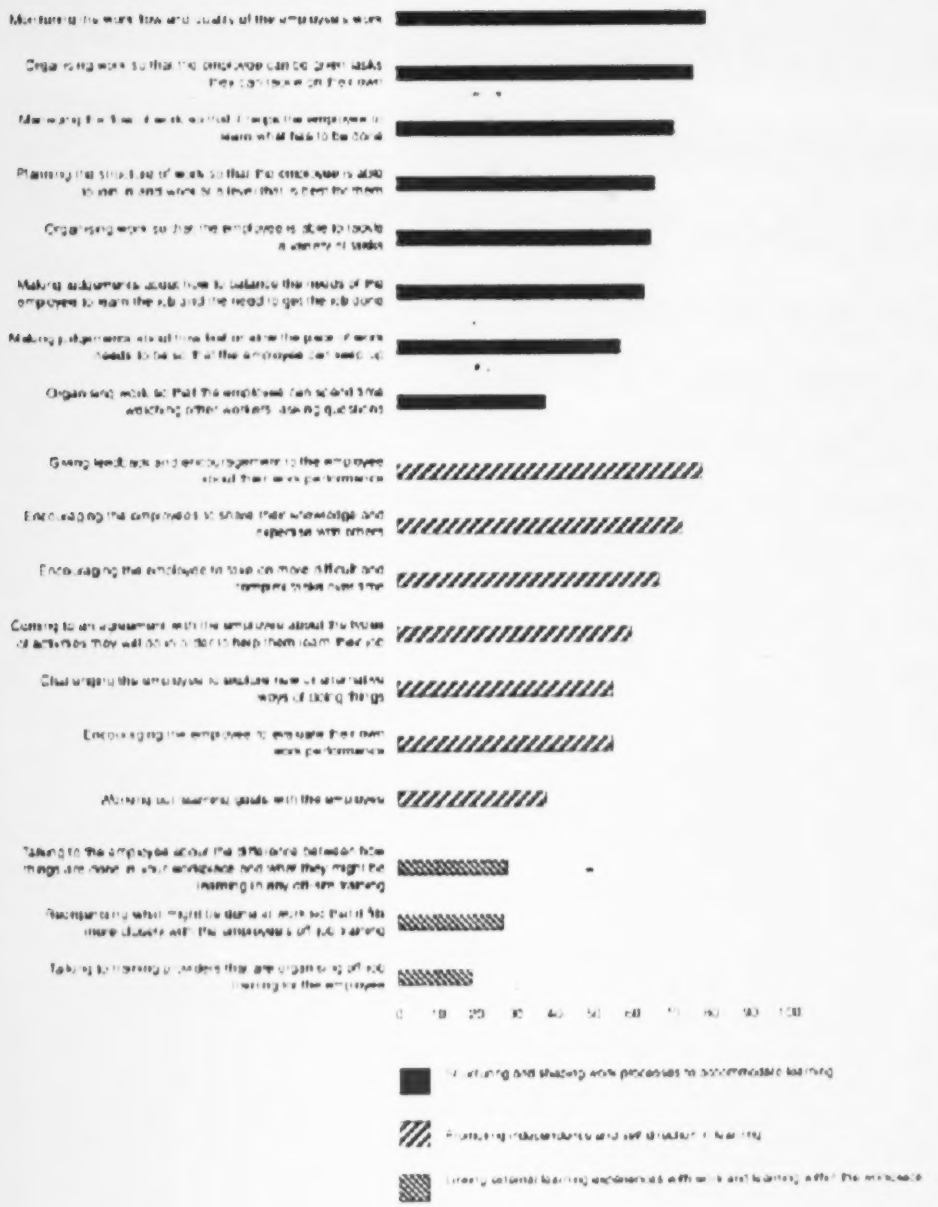

Trainer actions cross-tabulated with various characteristics

The 32 trainer actions were cross-tabulated with a number of workplace trainer and enterprise characteristics in order to gauge whether there were any key variations. There were a number of statistically significant differences (see the tables below, with further details in appendix G), from which indicative conclusions can be made.

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Type of industry

Six of the trainer actions varied significantly by industry (table 5). Four of these were in building and construction, where trainers planned the structure of work, asked other workers to help, managed the flow of work and organised work to provide task variety significantly more than in the other two industries. This could be explained by the nature of this industry where sub-contracting predominates.

Table 5: Summary of percentages of trainers undertaking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often', by type of industry (showing only those statistically significant)

Trainer actions showing statistically significant differences (* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$)	Percentages reporting 'often'/'very often'		
	Type of industry:		
	Building	IT	Real estate
11 Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them **	78	60	65
12 Asking other workers to help the employee to learn different aspects of the job *	70	50	61
22 Managing the flow of work so that it helps the employee to learn what has to be done *	84	67	69
34 Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of work tasks *	79	57	66
13 Organising work so that the employee can spend time watching other workers, asking questions etc. *	40	33	51
16 Organising resources for the employee (e.g. books, materials, people) **	37	52	52

In the real estate industry, trainers more frequently organised work so employees could spend time with other workers. Possibly the less hands-on nature of the work in this industry enables flexibility to allow for this type of activity.

The other trainer action where there was a difference was organising resources for learners. In this case, trainers in both the information technology and real estate industries more frequently did this than those in the building and construction industry. It may have been that the types of resources suggested as examples—more learning than industrial resources—were of the type that workers in these two industries could more readily identify with and considered they were doing more often.

These findings suggest that the frequency with which some trainer actions are undertaken varies significantly between types of business. The nature of the work enables different kinds of trainer roles to be played.

Size of enterprise

Cross-tabulations by enterprise size showed four statistically significant differences (see table 6). In each case, it was in the micro businesses where trainers did a job with employees, helped them work out problems, organised work for task variety and took opportunities as they arose to talk with employees more frequently than did trainers in the larger-sized enterprises. It is likely that the very small size permits a degree of flexibility for those training in micro businesses to undertake these activities more frequently.

Table 6: Summary of percentages of trainers undertaking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often', by size of enterprise (showing only those statistically significant)

Trainer actions showing statistically significant differences (* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01)	Percentages reporting 'often'/'very often'		
	Size of enterprise (employees):		
	<6	6–20	>20
33 Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace **	79	64	64
10 Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks *	76	61	65
34 Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of work tasks *	71	59	70
28 Taking opportunities that arise during the day (such as at lunchtime, when driving from job to job) to talk with the employee about their job *	59	54	37

Type of industry and size of enterprise

Within each industry, the frequency with which the trainer actions were undertaken varies significantly with the size of the enterprise. In building and construction, five trainer actions varied significantly; in real estate, two trainer actions; and in information technology, four trainer actions. These results are summarised in table 7 below which shows, for ease of reading, only the percentages of trainers reporting they took these actions 'often' or 'very often' (the complete tables are presented in appendix G).

The clear trend in the information technology industry is for frequency of these actions to be higher as the size of the enterprise decreases. This pattern, however, is not consistent in the other industries.

What is interesting is that there is no trainer action that shows a significant difference in frequency depending on enterprise size in more than one industry. The frequency with which some particular trainer actions are used does vary according to enterprise size, but this variation is for different trainer actions in each of the industries participating in this study. Thus we can say that size matters, but only for industry-specific trainer actions. Since the industries chosen for the study were selected because they were deemed different from one another, this result is perhaps not surprising. Further, the trainer actions that exhibit significant differences depending on enterprise size generally have a *prima facie* logic about them, supported by the qualitative data gathered on their work contexts. For example, the actions listed under information technology may be the types of training behaviours that could be expected in an industry where much of the work is project centred, knowledge based and involves peer collaboration. However, such conclusions would need further research.

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Table 7: Summary of percentages of trainers undertaking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often', by type of industry and size of enterprise (showing only those statistically significant)

Trainer actions showing statistically significant differences, clustered by type of industry (* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01)	Percentages reporting 'often'/'very often'		
	Size of enterprise (employees):		
	<6	6–20	>20
Building and construction:			
30 Giving feedback and encouragement to the employee about their work performance **	87	61	92
10 Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks *	80	67	58
20 Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing *	96	92	77
23 Making judgements about how fast or slow the pace of work needs to be so that the employee can keep up *	52	79	80
29 Making connections between seemingly unconnected events so that the employee can use their learning in new or different situations *	48	26	50
Real estate:			
27 Encouraging employees to share their knowledge and expertise with others (e.g. in meetings) **	70	97	61
25 Monitoring the work flow and the quality of the employee's work *	62	85	94
Information technology:			
33 Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace **	83	53	50
24 Making judgements about how to balance the needs of the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done *	70	61	49
35 Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things *	70	53	43
36 Learning about new ideas, products, processes from the employee *	65	47	34

Ownership of the business

In fact, 11 of the trainer actions showed significant differences in frequency depending on whether the trainer is the business owner. In each case, owners perform these trainer actions significantly more often than do non-owners (see table 8).

Table 8: Summary of percentages of trainers undertaking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often', by ownership of the business (showing only those statistically significant)

Trainer actions showing statistically significant differences (* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001)	Percentages reporting 'often'/'very often'	
	Ownership of the business:	
	Yes	No
11 Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them *	75	62
14 Organising work so that the employee can be given tasks they can tackle on their own ***	87	69
25 Monitoring the work flow and the quality of the employee's work *	86	75
5 Talking with an employee to work out what they do and do not know about aspects of their job **	72	54
6 Coming to an agreement with the employee about the types of activities they will do in order to help them learn their job**	68	55
7 Working out learning goals with the employee **	49	33
20 Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing **	94	83
21 Making time to talk to the employee about their work ***	84	67
26 Correcting the employee's mistakes *	61	57
31 Encouraging the employee to evaluate their own work performance **	67	49
35 Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things *	64	50

An examination of these particular actions reveals that there may be at least three explanations for this result. The first is that the owners hold a position of power and authority that enables them to undertake a restructuring of the workplace in some way. For example, they plan the structure of work for the employee to do tasks at a level best for them, organise work for employees to tackle on their own and monitor the work flow. The nature of these actions reflects a level of capacity to manoeuvre either the employee's work or their own time in order to maximise opportunities for facilitated learning.

The second explanation may be that owners also have a longer term view and greater vested interest in ensuring that their employee learns. They talk with the employee about what they do and do not know about their work, and come to an agreement with the employee about the types of activity they should undertake. They also work out learning goals with the employee, talk to the employee as they work with them about what they are doing, and make time to talk to the employee about their work.

The third explanation may be that owners would want errors to be minimised and continuous improvement to be an integral component of their workplace. For example, they correct their employees' mistakes and encourage them to evaluate their own work performance significantly more often than do the non-owners. Also, they challenge their employees to explore new and alternative ways of doing work tasks.

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Length of experience

Length of experience did not appear to have a great bearing on frequency of trainer actions. There were only two actions that recorded a significant difference when cross-classified with experience categories (table 9).

Table 9: Summary of percentages of trainers undertaking trainer actions 'often' or 'very often', by length of experience (showing only those statistically significant)

Trainer actions showing statistically significant differences (* = p<0.05)	Percentages reporting 'often'/'very often'		
	Length of experience (years):		
	<6	6–20	>20
13 Organising work so that the employee can spend time watching other workers, asking questions etc. *	42	33	53
24 Making judgements about how to balance the needs of the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done *	58	67	75

The pattern was not consistent, although in both cases it was the most experienced trainers who undertook these actions. A possible explanation may be that both these actions involve considerable knowledge of and familiarity with the enterprise together with job experience, 'seniority' or respect of peers, and sophisticated judgement. These attributes are more likely to be found in workplace trainers with considerable length of service in the industry, and particularly in the one enterprise.

This chapter has analysed in detail a number of important functions of the workplace trainer and actions taken in helping others learn in the workplace. The following chapter examines how these trainers manage to balance the tasks of carrying out their own work while at the same time assisting others learn on the job.

Juggling roles and developing skills

Juggling the twin roles of worker and trainer

The literature examining training in the workplace emphasises the twin tasks of working, while at the same time assisting others to learn their job. In this study, respondents were usually working in a context where they were responsible for their own work and the training of other workers. These dual roles have the potential to conflict with one another, thus creating dilemmas for the workers. Respondents were therefore asked how they managed to juggle the demands of training and getting their own work done.

Only six respondents reported that juggling the demands of training and work was not an issue for them. A small proportion of respondents (11%) indicated that, while they experienced this conflict, they could not name any specific strategies they used to deal with it. Most just commented that *it just happens* or suggested that juggling trainer and worker roles was *just a matter of fitting them in*. These comments suggest a 'just-in-time' approach to training that is not seen as separate from their work.

> *Attend to it as I see the need, more of a knee-jerk approach, which of course could be better …*

The most often used strategy to cope with the demands of training and working was 'to work longer hours' (22%). These responses highlight the demands of working in tight economic contexts where core business takes a high priority. Many of the respondents adopting this strategy noted the difficulty in juggling the demands of training. They also hint at the hidden costs of training which an enterprise absorbs.

> *Time management … I work to fit in with employees … come back to my job later … it is more important that employee's job is done correctly rather than me going home at 5 pm.*
>
> *… do my own work when I can fit it in … sometimes I don't have lunch breaks or I do work in the evenings.*

In fact, 16 per cent of respondents believed that they needed to plan and prioritise their work very carefully in order to juggle the demands of training and work. Coupled with time management (14% of respondents), these clusters of responses point to the active way in which many workplace trainers integrate learning into their workplaces and the key role that good management practices play in making training a reality. They also underscore the ways in which the functions of work and training shape each other.

> *… making a decision at the beginning of the job as to how much time I can spend showing them.*
>
> *Prioritising my work in the morning and communicating very regularly with other workers—employers and employees.*
>
> *We prioritise … if their job is important it gets done first … and if our job is more important then that gets done.*
>
> *Computerised diary and checklist system [that] automatically tells you when to do what—a system for effective time management.*

Another key strategy mentioned by five per cent of respondents relied on the less experienced workers being left to tackle jobs on their own. In these instances the workplace trainer would rely heavily on supervision and being available to answer any questions or correct mistakes as the need arose.

... just show them once or twice and let them have a go and build on those skills gradually ...

Just give the employees tasks that I think they may have a grasp on and let them get on with it and I step in if they are taking too long.

Sometimes they must watch me do it and then they start doing it themselves, other times I will get them started and leave them to their own devices until they get stuck. I encourage people to ask for help.

The preceding examples of this strategy suggest that the workplace trainer is obliged to make continual assessments of the abilities and competence of workers and how these can then be matched with the requirements of the task at hand. The actions of the trainer also appear to be underpinned by working relationships that are open and supportive where less experienced workers can ask questions and receive feedback as required.

In addition, 5 per cent of respondents reported using other workers to supervise or, alternatively, they delegated training to other more experienced workers. This allowed the trainer to continue with their work or tackle other workplace issues. This strategy also enabled the workplace trainer to involve other staff in training and 'share the load'.

... peer support [is important] ... [we] *normally try to pair people off with other people.*

[We] *spread the workload with other staff to show person what to do.*

There were a number of other strategies used by workplace trainers in their effort to meet the demands of the workplace. These included:

- setting aside specific times to train
- providing clear direction to less experienced workers both before they commence a task and while they are completing it
- sharing their own work with a less experienced worker; that is, doing a task together
- building open communication and good working relationships which, in turn, assists less experienced workers to ask for help and also enables other workers to help out as needed
- relying on good supervision
- being well organised and disciplined in their work habits
- using 'down time' for training
- ensuring they employed capable trainees and apprentices who would not be too demanding of the trainer's time

The maintenance of balance between working and training is evidently an ongoing issue for the workplace trainers in this study. However, the study found that generally they are able to employ strategies for coping with these twin demands. Such strategies included working longer hours, planning and prioritising work very carefully, supervising 'at a distance', continual judging of abilities and competence of workers and how these could be matched with the requirements of the task at hand, and using other workers to supervise. They also delegated training tasks.

Developing the skills of workplace trainers

Opinions varied widely on how the skills required for being a successful and effective workplace trainer might be developed and were, to a large extent, a product of the training culture in the industry/enterprise setting in which the trainer operated. Respondents suggested a range of strategies that they believed could assist in training workplace trainers to undertake their role.

A number of respondents suggested that the 'trade school' curriculum could be revised and that either:

- issues relating to training in the workplace be incorporated within apprenticeship training, or

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- apprentices could be better prepared for the world of work, thus reducing the strain on those who train them in the workplace

  My skills could go into the training of employees, such as TAFE or trade school.

Opinion was divided among respondents in relation to the *types* of training that would assist workplace trainers. A number believed that formal off-the-job training courses (much like the existing 'train-the-trainer' programs) would be of great benefit. Possible training strategies included:

- seminars
- trade shows
- mentoring schemes
- informal opportunities where trainers had the opportunity to discuss their work with other trainers and share problems

Some respondents suggested that industry training associations, TAFE and other industry bodies could play a leading role in providing these types of courses.

Seminars with people who are doing the work to make a good connection.

Others suggested that written materials (guides, manuals, checklists), made available in the workplace, would be of greater assistance.

A brochure to remind people in my business to remember to find time to sit down and talk to them.

There was a group of respondents, however, who believed that the learning required for success as a workplace trainer was experientially based. In the building industry, for example, where a strong tradition of apprenticeship training remains, the skills of the workplace trainer are, first and foremost, a product of their trade training and the years of experience that they have accumulated as a tradesperson. An in-depth knowledge of the trade was seen as vital, along with a range of personal attributes such as patience and a willingness to share their skills and knowledge with others.

In other industries, the acquisition of skills as a trainer was viewed as an 'informal thing' which largely grows out of the workplace trainer having experienced the process of being a learner his/herself and, through this experience, having developed a tacit understanding of what was needed in order to be an effective workplace trainer.

The ability to 'know' how to facilitate learning or assess the performance of a learner was often a product of accumulated experience. A trainer would often compare 'this trainee with that one', making decisions about the skill development process and 'how well' the learner was doing based on previous experiences and the trainer's estimation of how long it should take to develop the skill in question. Reference to what helped the trainer learn (that is, drawing on the trainer's experience of learning and what worked best for them) was also a key to the development of training skills. In many respects, the development of training skills appeared to be grounded in a 'role-modelling' approach where trainers consciously reproduced the training experiences they themselves had found helpful. Alternatively, where the trainer had observed or had negative experiences of training, they set out to create 'exactly the opposite' type of training environment.

The workplace trainer's own experiences of learning and training were also thought to exert a strong influence on the development of effective workplace training skills. Positive learning experiences were valued because they exposed trainers to the potential benefits accruing from training and hence imbued the trainers with a belief in the value of training which, in turn, helped the trainer to provide authentic experiences for their learners:

... because if they are being asked to do training and they don't really believe in it, because they've had a bad experience, that's going to show through very easily to the people they're trying to train.

Some respondents did suggest that this experiential learning could be supplemented with other strategies, such as formal courses and/or written materials. This group of respondents also saw value in providing opportunities for workplace trainers to meet and discuss their work.

A small group of respondents suggested that training alone would not be enough to support the workplace trainer. They believed that workplaces and employers also needed to play a role in creating work environments which would help trainers in their work. Strategies suggested included clearly articulating training as part of workers' roles, supportive management systems, documentation and allowing time for training. One respondent noted that raising the awareness of employees to the importance of lifelong learning could also assist trainers.

The following three chapters discuss the implications and conclusions of the research, particularly focussing on the role of the workplace trainer in the light of the literature previously reviewed and the findings from this study.

Discussion, implications and conclusions

Informal workplace training/learning and the workplace trainer

The paradox of informal workplace training/learning: Pervasive yet invisible

The data from this study highlight three important aspects of training in the workplace—the incidence of informal training, the nature of that training and the role played by the informal workplace 'trainer' in fostering learning. In doing so, this study has helped to uncover hidden aspects of informal workplace training.

The study has demonstrated the pervasiveness of informal training in the workplace. It has revealed that informal training, through the helping hands of colleagues in the regular course of the working day in spontaneous and just-in-time ways, is of central importance in workplaces. The findings also cast doubt on assumptions that micro and small businesses do not undertake training. Because informal workplace training is part of everyday work activities and occurs (contrary to widely held assumptions) in both small and micro businesses, it is therefore less visible and less able to be measured.

The study has reinforced the significance of statistics on 'unstructured training', defined as:

> *Training activity that does not have a specified content or predetermined plan. It includes unplanned training that is provided as the need arises and training activity that is not monitored such as self-training through reading manuals or using self-training computer packages.*
>
> (ABS 1998, p.66)

According to ABS (1998) figures, the proportion of small business employers providing training in the 12 months to February 1997 was 57 per cent, which comprised 30 per cent structured training and 27 per cent unstructured training. In micro businesses, the equivalent figures were for all training 45 per cent, made up of 20 per cent structured training and 25 per cent unstructured training. This proportion of unstructured training represents the invisible component of the training iceberg, remaining largely unspecified and unexplored.

The study has also illuminated the nature of this informal training in the three industries participating in this study. One of the most important revelations from the research data demonstrates the inter-relationship between learning and work. Workplace trainers reported very high instances of planning and structuring work to enable learners to work at their best level, arranging work to give employees a variety of tasks, managing the work flow to optimise learning opportunities and making judgements about the balance between the needs of the individual and the need to get the job done.

While it is true that the unplanned, unscheduled, unrehearsed and spontaneous training of which Vallence (1997) speaks is apparent in many enterprises, this does not necessarily equate to serendipity, poor quality or ineffectiveness on the part of those doing the training. The seeming *ad hoc* character of much of what goes on could mask a highly sophisticated and elaborate training strategy which incorporates an intricate knowledge of both the job that needs to be completed and the skills that need to be imparted to complete that job in the most cost-effective manner.

It is clear that, particularly in micro and small businesses, learning and work are inextricably interwoven. The role of the workplace trainer as 'boundary rider' in these enterprises requires

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an understanding of this close inter-relationship and a specific set of skills that enable him/her to balance the needs of the worker vis-à-vis the needs of the enterprise. What seems to be evident is that this set of skills is not entirely generic. The skills needed by the workplace trainer differ depending on the nature of the work in a particular industry and the size of the enterprise. Poell and Chivers (1999, p.12) also concluded in their study of 19 British organisations that 'certain tendencies within learning networks are not universal for all organisations but vary according to work characteristics'. In their Australian study, Hayton et al. (1996) identified mediating factors within an enterprise that diminish or increase the amount of training activity; for example, enterprise size and type of industry. The data from this study show that such mediating factors influence not only the amount of training but also the type and frequency of trainer actions in supporting this training. The identity of the trainer, the length of experience and whether he/she is the owner of the business also have a bearing on the set of skills used. Thus the relationship between the enterprise and the work undertaken within it and the learning required forms the focus around which the trainer operates. This is in stark contrast to the focus on competencies that dominates formal workplace training.

This study has highlighted not only the pervasiveness and nature of informal training in the workplace, but also particularly the critical role that informal trainers play in promoting learning. Workplace trainers foster environments conducive to learning; they work and learn with co-workers, structure and shape work processes to accommodate learning, promote self-direction in learning and, although to a much lesser extent, link external learning experiences with work and learning within their enterprise. The findings in this research go some way towards rectifying the neglect of what workplace trainers actually do in fostering learning, and therefore responding to the conclusion of McDonald et al. (1993, p.38) seven years ago that little is known about trainers in Australia (see page 2 of this report).

Contrasting conceptions of the role of workplace trainers

The findings on the nature and frequency of the actions employed by the trainers interviewed for this study raise critical questions about the official workplace trainer competency standards developed in the 1990s. These standards first appeared as Workplace Trainer Category 1 competency standards in the early 1990s, and now have been refined and released (in 1999) as a unit of competency, 'Train small groups', within the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. It is clear that there are many important differences between the role of the workplace trainer portrayed in these standards and that depicted by the trainers described in this study. A critical analysis of the national competency standards reveals a number of assumptions underlying them that reflect a particular view of the workplace trainer and of the context (or lack of context) in which they function. Appendix H articulates the researchers' analysis of these standards, highlighting the assumptions underpinning them as well as areas of potential confusion and lack of completeness. It is our contention that the experiences reported by the workplace trainers in this study challenge many of these assumptions.

The analysis of the competency standards indicates that they are characterised by a notion of training that is formal, structured, delivered, assessed, recorded and certified. The unit, 'Train small groups' (like its predecessor, the Category 1 standards), still has an overwhelming emphasis on *training* rather than *facilitating learning*, and formalised on-site training is still valued almost to the exclusion of informal and incidental learning processes. There is also an implicit assumption that the trainer knows best, has the legitimate authority and is the one with the 'right' knowledge and skill. In a real sense these competency standards seem to be a-contextual, framed *in vacuo* without reference to the workplace. There is a need to put 'work' back into notions of the 'workplace trainer'. They may well be trainer competency standards, but they fall short of being 'workplace' trainer competency standards. Our conclusion is that, while they are significant, they do not go far enough, either with respect to the actions involved in informal training or in terms of the actual processes within micro and small business. They do not tell the complete story.

The findings of this study underscore the significant difference between the worker–trainer and the provider-based trainer (and even the enterprise-based designated trainer). While there is an increasing imperative for provider-based staff (for example, TAFE teachers) to become more entrepreneurial and to 'get out into industry', there is a need to recognise that their role is quite a different one in the light of network theory. The workplace-based trainer is involved in both the work and the learning networks of the enterprise which greatly influence, as we have elaborated in this report, both the nature of the role and degree to which the trainer can fulfil it. The trainer is also a worker. The provider-based trainer is not situated within an enterprise's work network and thus plays a different role. Simply put, the outsider is in a different position from the insider, and therefore by necessity plays a different part in the theatre of training. There are advantages and disadvantages for both. For example, the outsider is considerably less affected by the possible constraints of intra-enterprise networks than the enterprise-based trainer. On the other hand, the outsider is also very likely to be less effective by virtue of more limited understanding of the structures, processes, relationships, values and so on of the workplace, and therefore needs to spend more time and effort becoming accustomed to the culture of the enterprise. The main point here is that the current national competency standards reflect a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that does not accord with the various types of trainer.

It is acknowledged that the range of variables may allow space and the room to manoeuvre for some of the trainer actions identified in this research. However, interpretation is left to the individual trainer. The key point is that the rationale for identifying and describing competency standards is the necessity for defining what it is that workers (in this case, trainers) actually do in the workplace and to minimise the need for individual interpretation. Thus a set of competency standards that does not do this is no better than definitions of the role of workplace trainers that existed prior to the introduction of national competency standards. In our view, there is therefore need for prompt revision of these standards. To be both effective and useful, a revised set of competency standards should be both less ambiguous and more encompassing of all workplace activity, particularly that occurring in micro and small enterprises.

Reconceptualising the role of workplace trainer

Network learning theory, examined earlier in this report, offers some new and valuable insights into understanding the relationships between learning and work within an enterprise. Network learning theory emphasises the dynamic and interrelated nature of the learning and work networks and the role that individuals play in creating and re-creating these networks over time. Drawing on this theory and the insights gained from the data collected in this study, a new understanding of the role of the enterprised-based workplace trainer becomes possible.

Within the enterprises we examined in this study, the overriding concern of the workplace trainers and their colleagues was to 'get the job done'. This was especially important in the small and micro businesses. As network learning theory points out, essentially this means that the work network predominates, sometimes at the expense of the learning that might take place. As we have demonstrated, work shapes learning (see figure 4). The networks are not treated equally nor afforded the same level of importance within an enterprise. This factor has implications for the workplace trainer and considerably influences both the way in which and the degree to which he/she is able to act as 'trainers'.

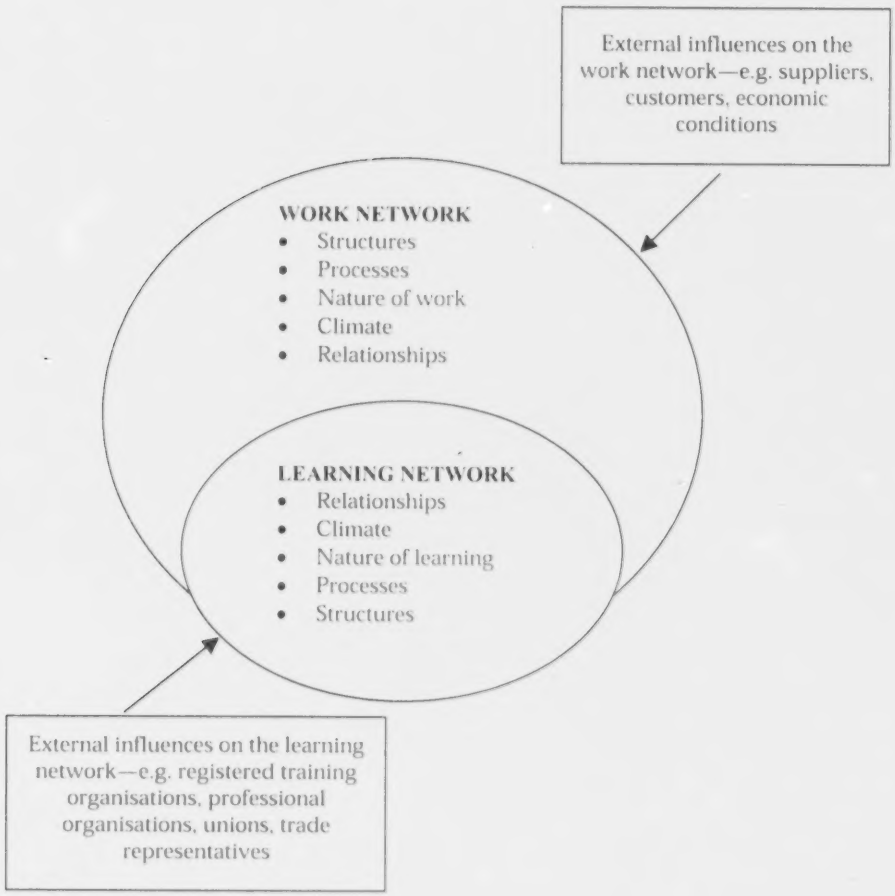
The results of this study reveal how the learning networks shape the role of the workplace trainer in an enterprise. In some cases the workplace trainer is a key player in this network, as in the case of a trainer who is part of a human resource department in an enterprise. In other instances, the workplace trainer is predominantly a worker. Here the work structures, processes and content shape and limit the time and energy available for facilitating learning. Hence actions of the trainer contribute to shaping a different type of learning network. The role of the workplace trainer can also be shaped indirectly through the actions of external organisations such as registered training organisations and other bodies. These external organisations act to shape the nature of the learning network that may be developed in an enterprise by supporting structures such as traineeships, apprenticeships or other training programs. These findings also challenge the notion of the 'one-size-fits-all' trainer. Trainers in different enterprises will develop different ways of working. The learning and work networks created in their enterprise will shape trainers' roles.

In small and micro businesses the workplace trainer, in conjunction with other workers, shapes the learning network which emerges over time. Ways of helping people to learn in an organisation often bear little resemblance to formal approaches to training observed in institutional or other off-the-job settings. Learning is usually not shaped by objectives, assessment processes or structured opportunities for practice. Rather, learning:

- emerges idiosyncratically from the work structures, processes and content
- is shaped by the workplace climate and the relationships between workers

The learning network in an enterprise is created by the actions of the workplace trainer in conjunction with other workers. Each enterprise in our study had developed unique learning networks. Within these networks the trainers had a distinct, but defined role which encompassed a range of different types of learning situations. Through their actions on the learning and work networks within an enterprise, workplace trainers are able to create, support and maintain spaces in which they support the learning of their work colleagues either as individuals or as groups of workers (figure 5).

Figure 4: The relationship between work and learning networks within an enterprise



Legend:

The work network consists of the following components:

- *Structures:* the ways in which power, roles and responsibilities in relation to work are distributed in the enterprise
- *Processes:* the ways in which work tasks are planned, organised and implemented by the workers
- *Nature of work:* the type of work being undertaken within the enterprise, for example, repetitive jobs, broad jobs, variable jobs, complex jobs
- *Climate:* the values, beliefs and rules that govern the way people act in the workplace. Climate can be influenced by specific workplace policies and legislative requirements
- *Relationships:* the values and rules that underpin the way people relate to each other during work. This includes communication patterns, flow, content etc.

The learning network consists of the following components:

- *Relationships:* the values and rules that underpin the way people involved in learning communicate and relate to each other. These relationships will embody the stance and ways of thinking that individuals hold in relation to learning and facilitating the learning of work colleagues
- *Climate:* the values, beliefs and rules that underpin learning within the enterprise
- *Nature of learning:* the learning that is available within an enterprise. This can include both formal and informal opportunities for learning as well as those that might be implemented with the assistance of external bodies such as registered training organisations
- *Processes:* the ways in which training and/or learning opportunities are planned, organised and implemented within an enterprise. This also includes the development and implementation of training policies
- *Structures:* the ways in which power, roles and responsibilities in relation to facilitating learning or providing training are distributed in the enterprise

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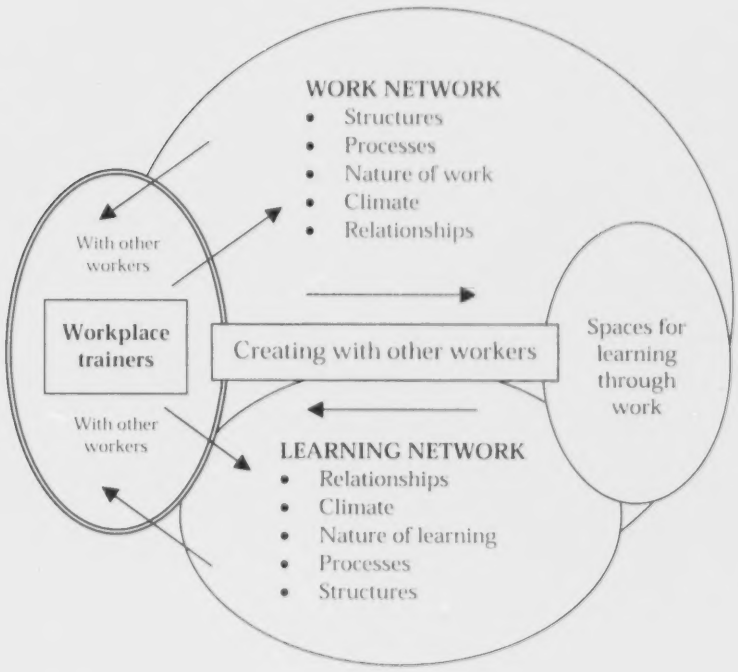
Figure 5: The role of the workplace trainer in an enterprise



An effective workplace trainer is aware of the impact of the work network on learning in their enterprise and how the work network can be shaped and reshaped by their efforts in supporting learning. The workplace trainer has a key role to play in assisting to alter the 'shape' of work structures, processes, relationships, content and climate to accommodate learning in the workplace. An effective workplace trainer is able to create and shape work so that learning is possible.

Implications of the findings

The findings of this study have important implications for two main policy areas—the quality of VET provision and the building of a training/learning culture. These policy areas are important elements in both *Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998–2003* (ANTA 1998) and *The national research and evaluation strategy for vocational education and training in Australia: 1997–2000* (NCVER 1997).

Quality of training provision

One of the key assumptions of this study has been that quality of training in the workplace depends to a considerable extent on workplace trainers, broadly defined in this study to include not only those designated as 'trainers' or 'human resource developers' but also regular workers/employees who in some way assist others to learn in their setting. Given this premise, the findings raise a number of questions relating to quality of training provision. A substantial amount of training occurring in the workplace is of the 'unstructured', informal kind, particularly in micro and small businesses. For the workplace 'trainers' in these settings, the national competency standards are of only minimal assistance. Firstly, their penetration into such enterprises is not great—only a minority had heard of them, let alone completed training courses based on them. Secondly, even where trainers do know of their existence or have completed such courses, the impact of the standards upon their training practices is reported to be relatively low. Thirdly, the relevance of these standards to informal trainers, especially in small businesses, appears slight. The formal competencies are not necessarily those used in micro and small business, and are certainly not, as the data in this study show, the complete picture for those training in such settings. In this respect, the findings of this study may well be of considerable interest to those undertaking the next review of these national competency standards.

Quality of training provision may also be affected by the extent of collaboration between industry and training providers. The data in this study reveal a relatively low level of liaison between workplace trainers and external providers. The research appears to indicate that a mix of off-the-job and on-the-job training is generally preferable to entirely one or the other (Field 1997; Hager 1997; Harris et al. 1998). This low level of liaison therefore is of concern. Similarly, the allowable extent under current policy for training taken entirely on the job needs to be carefully monitored in the light of these findings.

The issue therefore raised here is how best to equip workplace trainers, particularly informal trainers, with the skills highlighted in this study. An earlier section of this report has provided suggestions in this regard, which hold implications for the nature of provider training, the provision of relevant and high-quality training materials, and the creation of spaces for experiential learning, interaction and strategy-sharing in the workplace itself.

Building a training/learning culture

Another of the key assumptions in this study has been that workplace trainers play a crucial role in building a training/learning culture in workplaces. This study holds important implications for the national policy direction of building a training/learning culture within

industry. While national initiatives are helpful in setting the overall climate, a training/learning culture is likely to evolve distinctively in each workplace according to the interpretations of its inhabitants rather than through government fiat. Change-management philosophy indicates that policy initiatives are often filtered and interpreted at coalfaces. In this instance then, the role of workplace trainers (as the key figures in the learning network within each enterprise) is critical, as is the catalysing effect of informal training at all levels in an enterprise. In this respect, we, like Gibb (1999, p.47), raise the interesting question of whether the culture of training is a VET-driven training culture or an enterprise-evolving training culture.

If a training/learning culture is defined as:

> *... a set of distinctive behaviours, beliefs and values shared by all Australians ... which leads them to a lifelong interest in vocational education and training and a visible commitment to participating in investing in both formal and informal training* (ANTA 1998, p.20),

then it is the informal trainer who is in the prime position to impact considerably on these elements. It is in these ways that the informal trainer has a crucial role to play in the development of a learning culture in the small business workplace, which, after all, represents 90 per cent of all enterprises in Australia (Robinson 1999, p.3).

Field (1997) contends that there is not much research on small business learning, and yet a better understanding of this is critical if we are to talk of developing a training culture. Gibb (1999, p.58) has drawn attention to the fact that, in small business, 'a training and learning culture does exist but it may not be the one the VET system has in mind'. Other researchers have highlighted that learning is an ongoing and continuing process in small business (Hager 1997; Field 1997; Childs et al. 1997; Kilpatrick & Bell 1998). This study has provided evidence which demonstrates that a considerable amount of informal training and, by implication learning, is occurring in small business, although it is largely unrecognised and is not of the structured kind that 'counts' in VET statistics.

There are two important issues here relevant to the building of a training/learning culture. The first is how best to make the hidden world of 'unstructured' informal training more visible so that in some way it can be credited (counted) as training and therefore recognised and valued as a legitimate form of educational experience. This issue was not an objective of this study, rather a finding from it, and remains an area for further research and policy development. Thus here there are important implications for the Australian Recognition Framework in that there is a significant amount of training taking place that is not being recognised or 'counted' by the system. This, in turn, could lead to inefficiencies in the National Training Framework in requiring training to be carried out which could, at least potentially, be granted RPL (recognition of prior learning) or recognised earlier.

The second issue is how training/learning can be further encouraged within enterprises. This study reminds us to think realistically about what is happening in enterprises in relation to power relations, roles and work networks, and the need to take into account the complete context of the enterprise when considering training. Training is often considered in isolation without contextualising it—as if it existed in the same form everywhere. This is the 'one-size-fits-all' perspective which does not appear to match the 'real' workplace, particularly in micro and small business. The nature and extent of the training carried out in enterprises as reported in this study underscore the importance of considering a number of contextual factors, including size of enterprise, type of industry, ownership of the business, as well as many other factors implicit in learning network theory such as processes, climate and relationships.

Two sets of results highlighted in this report look promising for the policy direction concerned with building a training/learning culture in industry. First, many of the highest frequencies of 'trainer actions' were those which reflected the trainers' keen interest in employees' concerns, normally expressed by making time for interaction in daily working life. These included talking with employees while working alongside them, giving feedback and encouragement about work performance, making time to talk to them about their work, encouraging them to share their knowledge and expertise with other workers, listening to

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their concerns and difficulties, doing a job with them to enable them to offer assistance, telling them stories and helping them work out problems that occur in the workplace. These actions tend to be the more affective behaviours that help to build confidence, boost self-esteem, promote communication, increase motivation and generally encourage informal learning.

Second, there was also a high degree of encouraging self-direction in learning in the employees. Some actions were all taken 'often' or 'very often' by well over half the trainers. These included giving feedback and encouragement about work performance, encouraging them to share their knowledge and expertise with others, and encouraging them to take on more difficult and complex tasks over time. Other actions that fell into these categories included coming to agreement with the employee about activities which will assist them to learn, encouraging them to evaluate their own work performance, and challenging them to explore new or alternate ways of doing things.

If the policy direction of developing a training/learning culture is to be realised, it is important for us to learn more about how training and learning occur in the workplace. There is a need for more research across different industries so that the various jigsaw pieces can eventually be fitted together to form a meaningful picture. There is also a need for more conceptualisation so that we can theorise more about the nature and extent of formation of a training/learning culture. A deeper understanding of how learning of various types occurs within the workplace and a re-thinking of the role of workplace trainer would both appear to have much to offer those interested in promoting government policy to build a training/learning culture within enterprises. As Poell and Chivers (1999, p.11) have recently declared: 'informal learning and learning from daily work experiences are relatively under-addressed issues'.

It may well be that government attempts to promote a training/learning culture within enterprises cannot hope to succeed without clear recognition of and due consideration given to learning networks other than the vertical. With current trends towards the de-institutionalisation of training and employees increasingly being held more responsible for individual development, learning network theory suggests that the other learning networks—the self-initiated, horizontal and external—are assuming a level of importance worthy of considerably more attention. Moreover, there is evidence that in a context of decreasing budgets, training is increasingly taking place outside training departments (Poell & Chivers 1999, p.10) and yet there is little understanding of, nor recognition for, this more informal kind of training and learning. To chat benignly about learning organisations being those where learning is co-terminous with work, or to attempt to implement formal training using a top-down (vertical), deficit approach only provides a part of the picture. The first lacks reality and may be destined to remain in glossy managerial documents as an attractive philosophy with little hope of actual and effective implementation; the second is somewhat 'colonial' and is appropriate only for certain types of organisational culture, comforting for those who need to justify numbers in formal training programs, at best short term and not feasible for small business which comprises the majority of Australian enterprises.

Implications for further research

This study focussed on the role of enterprise-based workplace trainers and how their role might be re-conceptualised in the light of new perspectives drawn from network learning theory. However, there are many workplace trainers employed by institutions, such as registered training organisations, who work in enterprises. Research is needed to increase our understanding of how these provider-based trainers might best work with the learning and work networks in enterprises to further the goals of the current national strategy for VET.

An extension of this line of inquiry would be research that examines how external bodies influence and shape learning and work networks over time. Longitudinal studies that 'map' the implementation of VET training initiatives (such as training packages) would provide a valuable opportunity to examine the evolution of learning and work networks over time. Further research could also illuminate the influence of other actors within the workplace in

shaping learning and work networks. For example, the actions, theories, strategies and tactics of learners and managers in these networks could be examined.

Another area that deserves attention is the quality of learning networks established in enterprises. An exploration of quality could use the dimensions explicated in learning network theory (content, processes, structures, relationships and climate) as the basis for examination.

The use of learning network theory in this study has raised the issue of the tension which always exists between the self-initiated, self-directed learning needs of individual workers and the learning needs of the enterprise in which they work. We believe that further research that examines the degree to which certain types of learning and work networks foster self-direction and autonomy in learners within the workplace would be a valuable undertaking. The relative contributions learners, managers and trainers make towards achieving these goals could also be examined. This would be a potentially important step to making the rhetoric of training/learning culture a reality as a basis for lifelong learning in enterprises.

Furthermore, there is a need for an exploration of ways in which informal training/learning in the workplace might be more fully recognised and valued. This would include ways of framing policies to reflect what happens in reality, so that workers are able to receive recognition for their learning. The Australian Recognition Framework could be re-examined to accommodate this informal training and learning on an equal footing within the formal recognition system.

Finally, an analysis could be undertaken of the extent to which national training packages have incorporated units of competency relating to workplace training, and the extent to which such units have actually been taken up by enterprises and providers as a reflection of the increasing reality that every worker is also potentially an informal trainer.

Conclusions

This study sought to answer several fundamental questions regarding the role of workplace trainers in industry, particularly micro and small business, in the contemporary industry training climate which has seen a major shift in emphasis from off-the-job to on-the-job training. The process used an interpretative methodology, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collecting data. First, observations and interviews were undertaken in 18 enterprises across three States and in three industries, and detailed analysis made of this qualitative data with the assistance of NUD.ist software. Second, telephone interviews with 350 workplace trainers across the same three States and industries were held, and analysis of this quantitative data undertaken with the assistance of SPSS software. The key elements derived from the first stage formed the essence of the interview schedule for the second stage.

The key findings from the study are that:

- The penetration and impact of the workplace trainer competency standards is minimal.
- Work and learning are inextricably linked, and shape each other in a dynamic inter-relationship; for example when the trainer structured and manipulated work processes to accommodate employee learning.
- Five 'functions' were identified as central to the role of the workplace trainer: fostering an environment conducive to learning; working and learning with co-workers; structuring and shaping work processes to accommodate learning; promoting independence and self-direction in learners; linking external learning experiences with work and learning in the workplace.
- In addition, 32 'trainer actions' were isolated from observations and interviews, and then confirmed through telephone interviews with informal trainers in 350 enterprises.
- Informal workplace training is very common, judging from the overall frequency of 'trainer actions' reported by respondents.
- There was a high incidence of 'trainer actions' related to encouraging self-direction in learning in employees.
- The least frequent 'trainer actions' were those relating to the linking of internal and external learning experiences, particularly that of liaising with external providers.
- The frequency of many of the 'trainer actions' in the workplace was significantly (in statistical terms) mediated by context-specific factors such as type of industry, enterprise size, ownership of the business and, to a minor extent, length of experience.
- The majority of the 'trainer actions' did not directly match the competencies in the unit, 'Train small groups', which is the unit in the recently released Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training replacing the former Workplace Trainer Category 1 competency standards.
- Only very few respondents reported that juggling the twin tasks of working and assisting others to learn was not an issue for them.
- Various strategies are employed by the respondents in juggling the twin demands of worker and trainer, including working longer hours (the most common), planning and prioritising work very carefully, supervising 'at a distance', continual judging of abilities and competence of workers and how these could be matched with requirements of the task at hand, and using other workers to supervise or delegating training tasks.

- There is a range of strategies, reported by the respondents, which can be used to develop the skills of workplace trainers, such as revision of provider curriculum, less formal training opportunities, materials available in the workplace, experiential opportunities in the actual setting with space for discussion with others, and a number of specific ways in which employers could play a role in creating conducive work environments and policies.
- Learning network theory provides a useful framework for re-conceptualising the role of the workplace trainer.

From these findings, a number of implications relevant to the national VET strategy were discussed in relation to: quality of training provision; building a training/learning culture; and further research.

This research has explored new ways of conceptualising the role of the workplace trainer in an attempt to bring together a more contextually based and holistic view. The findings question the generally accepted notions of 'workplace trainer' as enshrined in the national competency standards, as embodied in the discourse of national conferences on training 'best practice' and as traditionally practised in large enterprises with dedicated human resource departments. Such notions tend to be founded on assumptions of formality, structured contexts and large business environments, and based on the premise that 'one size fits all'. The results particularly challenge the national competency standards for workplace trainers, and demonstrate that these standards do not sufficiently accommodate the role of the more informal trainer who, in the normal course of work, helps others learn in the workplace.

The study signals an urgent need for rethinking the role of workplace trainers, for its findings reveal that here there is 'more than meets the eye'.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project advisory group

The members, in addition to the researchers, included:

Kirsteen Macdougall	Executive Officer, Information Industries Training Advisory Board (SA) Inc., SPRI Building, Technology Park, Mawson Lakes
	From April 1999: Mr Shane Earls, Executive Officer
Emma Mackenzie	Acting Training Manager, Construction Industry Training Board, 81 Greenhill Road, Wayville
	From January 1999: Mr Marcus d'Assumpcao, Training Manager
Kevin McLoughlin	Training Manager, The Real Estate Institute of South Australia Incorporated, 249 Greenhill Road, Dulwich

Appendix B: Observation schedule

Site: _____

_____ Location: _____

Date: _____ Observer: _____

Trainer: _____

.....

Brief description of the context (who is involved—the trainees/other workers; their relevant characteristics)

What is the setting like (appearance, rules, any apparent customs, etc.)?

The purpose (why are the people there; what is the reaction of the people to this; what goals are being pursued?)

Stimulus	Objective	Action directed to whom?	Form of action	Qualities of the behaviour	Effects of the behaviour

KEY

Stimulus:	What triggered the interaction between the trainer and the worker(s), for example, an incident, a mistake, etc.
Objective:	What was the intention of the interaction, for example, to correct; to explain etc.
Direction of action:	To whom was the interaction directed, for example, a particular person, a group in general, other.
Form of action:	*Modelling* Trainer executes a task while the learner watches; trainer provides a model for imitation; shows standards to be achieved; may be accompanied by explanations ('talking aloud'); use of analogies, explanations, diagrams, questions. *Coaching* Observation and monitoring by the trainer while the worker undertakes activity; also includes repeat demonstrations, offering support, hints, cues, encouragement, questions. *Scaffolding* Trainer offers ongoing support during the course of work; provides opportunities to try new things (variations); additional suggestions, reminders, may include working with the learner, includes appraising worker's ability and difficulty of task (either by questioning or observation). *Fading* More distant support, for example, encouragement to try a more complex task. *Indirect guidance* Trainer provides access for learners to observe other workers, listen to them. Action might also include leaving or omitting the worker(s) from a job if a problem has arisen, breaking down a job into component parts which are subsequently shared out amongst trainer and worker(s); the use of monologues initiated by the trainer; linking previous jobs to the current one, cueing the workers; reflecting with the workers, challenging, arguing, encouraging workers to reflect etc. It may also include non-verbal behaviours such as gesturing. Actions could also be more formalised processes including a deliberate break in the work to focus on training, small group discussions etc. NB: this list is not exhaustive!!
Qualities of the behaviour:	For example, the intensity, persistence, unusualness, appropriateness, duration, effect, mannerisms
Effects of the behaviour:	What does it evoke from the workers? Does it maintain stability or destabilise? Does it change the climate? How is the reaction/change managed? What rules/norms appear to govern the social organisation?

Appendix C: Face-to-face interview schedule

Focus of interview: Expansion of what has been observed and to clarify observations. To explore the role of workplace guide in more detail

[Tape recorder]

Setting the scene

How long have you been working here at X?
What sorts of experience and qualifications do you have?
What is your role here at X?
How often might you be involved in guiding/training people you work with?

* Exactly who do you do this with?

General perspectives on guiding learning of other workers

When you are working with a person who is new or less experienced than you at a particular task, what do you do?

* Can you think of a specific time when this happened? Tell me about it.

Contrast that with what was observed by picking out one incident from the observation period; for example, when a problem arose; a mistake was made etc. Ask the person to recount what they remember of that incident (provide cues to key actions, intentions, reactions to/perceptions of effects.)

How do you know what to do in these situations? Where did you learn these particular ways of working with other workers?

When you are in situations like the ones we've talked about does the way you work change?

How does it change? Why does it change like that?

I noticed that when you're in these types of situations, you talk to people in a particular way. What things prompt you to talk like this?

Probe different aspects of communication and their rationale for use: questions, giving hints, cues, encouraging questions, feedback etc.

When you've been in situations like the ones we've talked about how do you know whether the person you've been working with has learnt/got it?

When you have to do this helping other workers to learn their job, how does it impact on your work? How do you manage this? Why do you approach it in this manner?

If you were looking for a person in X to do help others in the company learn their jobs, what sort of person would you look for? What things would they need to know? Be able to do? What sorts of attitudes would you think they need to show?

Do you think you can train someone to do this sort of thing? How might this be done? By whom?

Any other comments about helping others to learn their jobs?

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Appendix D: Telephone interview schedule

(prior to full conversion to CATI format)

How many employees work in your enterprise?

(a) 5 or less
(b) 6–20 people
(c) more than 20 people

[If quota industry size full, end call]

We would like to talk to a person in your organisation who has had some experience training employees on the job, informally by looking after trainees, apprentices or maybe helping new or less experienced staff learn their job.

Could I speak to someone involved in this type of informal training?

When connected through to a person:

We are conducting a survey about people who, for part of their job, have some responsibility for training the people they work with, usually as on-the-job type training. It's usually more informal training and might involve working with apprentices, trainees or employees who are new or less experienced and who need some assistance in learning more about their job. Have you been involved in this sort of training?

(a) Yes [proceed]
(b) No [conclude interview]

The survey should only take ten minutes. Your privacy is assured and the results of the research will be published and used to inform policy-makers and other businesses about how best to support learning in the workplace. Can I begin or would you rather I call back some other time?

(a) Yes [proceed]
(b) No [postpone interview]

Can you tell me which one of the following statements best describes your role as a workplace trainer in the enterprise you work in?

(a) I am required to act as a workplace trainer because it is written into my job description
(b) I am expected to train other employees but it is not something that is written into my job description
(c) I train other employees because it is something that I think is part of my job
(d) I train other employees because they ask me for help

We would like you now to think about the experience you've had working with individuals or small groups of employees who are learning on the job. We have a list of tasks. We would like you to estimate how often you do each of the tasks when you are working with those employees. Could you please use the following scale?

Very often
Often
Sometimes
Not every often
Hardly at all
Not applicable

(a) Talking with an employee to work out what they do and do not know about aspects of their job
(b) Coming to an agreement with the employee about the types of activities they will do in order to help them learn their job
(c) Working out learning goals with the employee
(d) Telling the employee stories; for example, what has happened in the past, interesting things about the job etc.
(e) Going to events with the employee such as training sessions, conferences, listening to a sales rep.
(f) Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks
(g) Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them
(h) Asking other workers to help the employee to learn different aspects of the job
(i) Organising work so that the employee can spend some time watching other workers, asking questions etc.
(j) Organising work so that the employee can be given tasks they can tackle on their own
(k) Talking to training providers that are organising off-job training for the employee (for example, employee progress, negotiating alternative assessment tasks, giving feedback)
(l) Organising resources for the employee (for example, books, materials, people)
(m) Reorganising what might be done at work so that it fits more closely with the employee's off-job training
(n) Talking to the employee about the difference between how things are done in your workplace and what they might be learning in any off-site training
(o) Encouraging the employee to take on more difficult and complex tasks over time
(p) Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing
(q) Making time to talk to the employee about their work
(r) Managing the flow of work so that it helps the employee to learn what has to be done
(s) Making judgements about how fast or slow the pace of work needs to be so that the employee can keep up
(t) Making judgements about how to balance the needs the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done
(u) Monitoring the work flow and quality of the employee's work
(v) Correcting the employee's mistakes
(w) Encouraging employees to share their knowledge and expertise with others (for example, in meetings)
(x) Taking opportunities that arise during the day (such as at lunchtime, when driving from job to job) to talk with the employee about their job
(y) Making connections between seemingly unconnected events so that the employee can use their learning in new or different situations
(z) Giving feedback and encouragement to the employee about their work performance
(aa) Encouraging the employee to evaluate their own work performance
(bb) Listening to the employee about any concerns or difficulties they might be having in the workplace
(cc) Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace
(dd) Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of work tasks
(ee) Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things
(ff) Learning about new ideas, products, processes from the employee

How do you think skills such as the ones we've just talked about could be best developed for people like you who help others to learn in the workplace?

How do you manage to juggle the demands of training an employee on the job and getting your own work done?

What is the title of your job?

How many years have you been working in this industry?

Are you the owner of the business/enterprise?

(a) Yes
(b) No

Have you completed any of the following training courses?

(a) Workplace Trainer Category I
(b) Workplace Trainer Category II
(c) Some other train-the-trainer course
(d) Workplace Assessor Training

Have you ever heard of the Competency Standards for Workplace Trainers and Assessors?

(a) Yes [If yes, proceed to next question]
(b) No [If no, conclude the interview]

Where did you hear about these competency standards?

(a) In a training course at work
(b) In a meeting you attended at work
(c) From other people in your workplace
(d) From a training course you went to outside of your enterprise
(e) From reading a trade magazine or journal
(f) Other places (for example, the Internet)

Which of the following statements best expresses your knowledge of these standards?

(a) I know a lot about them
(b) I know something about them
(c) I know only a little about them

To what extent have these standards affected the way you train employees in your workplace?

(a) Considerably
(b) To some extent
(c) Only a little
(d) Not at all

Conclude interview

Appendix E: Job titles of telephone respondents

Title of job position*	N
Managing Director, Executive Director, CEO, General Manager, Principal	53
Director	23
Owner (Proprietor), Owner-manager	27
Manager:	141
Manager *(one word only)*	40
Office	35
Sales	18
Finance	8
Production	5
Business/Business Development	5
Branch	5
Customer Service	5
Construction	3
Operations	3
Marketing	3
Corporate Services	2
Workshop	2
Assistant	2
Other: Store, Access, Quality (National), Solutions, Scanning	5
Consultant:	22
Sales	8
Property	6
Senior	3
Other: Building, Employment, Technical, IT, Senior Applications	5
Other office staff:	27
Director's Secretary, Secretary	9
Receptionist	8
Administrator	7
Office Assistant	2
Executive Assistant	1
Other finance:	9
Pay/Accounts Clerk, Financial Assistant	4
Accountant	3
Paymaster	2
HR Manager/Coordinator	3
Training Coordinator	4
Other miscellaneous job titles	41
Total	350

* Many of the job titles also subsume ownership of the business

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Appendix F

Frequency of actions taken by workplace trainers in working with individuals or small groups of employees who are learning on the job, clustered by function (and expressed in percentages)

Trainer functions and actions	Very often, Often %	Sometimes %	Not very often, Hardly at all %	Not applicable %	Total (N=350) %
1 **Fostering an environment conducive to learning**					
21 Making time to talk to the employee about their work	75	21	4	1	101
32 Listening to the employee about any concerns or difficulties they might be having in the workplace	72	19	7	1	99
33 Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace	70	24	5	1	100
5 Talking with an employee to work out what they do and do not know about aspects of their job	62	20	17	–	99
26 Correcting the employee's mistakes	58	25	16	1	100
28 Taking opportunities that arise during the day (such as lunchtime, when driving from job to job) to talk with the employee about their job	49	24	21	6	100
16 Organising resources for the employee (eg: books, materials, people)	44	28	22	6	100
29 Making connections between seemingly unconnected events so that the employee can use their learning in new or different situations	40	39	18	4	101
2 **Working and learning with co-workers**					
20 Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing	88	9	3	–	100
10 Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks	71	24	6	–	101

	Trainer functions and actions	Very often, Often %	Sometimes %	Not very often, Hardly at all %	Not applicable %	Total (N=350) %
8	Telling the employee stories, for example, what has happened in the past, interesting things about the job, etc.	70	19	10	1	100
12	Asking other workers to help the employee to learn different aspects of the job	57	25	12	5	99
36	Learning about new ideas, products, processes from the employee	46	35	16	1	98
9	Going to events with the employee such as training sessions, conferences, listening to a sales rep.	27	23	42	9	101
3	**Structuring and shaping work processes to accommodate learning**					
25	Monitoring the work flow and the quality of the employee's work	79	13	7	2	101
14	Organising work so the employee can be given tasks they can tackle on their own	76	16	7	1	100
22	Managing the flow of work so that it helps the employee to learn what has to be done	71	17	9	3	100
11	Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them	66	22	10	1	99
34	Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of tasks	65	23	10	3	101
24	Making judgements about how to balance the needs of the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done	64	23	11	2	100
23	Making judgements about how fast or slow the pace of work needs to be so that the employee can keep up	57	23	15	5	100
13	Organising work so that the employee can spend time watching other workers, asking questions, etc.	38	26	30	6	100

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Trainer functions and actions	Very often, Often %	Sometimes %	Not very often, Hardly at all %	Not applicable %	Total (N=350) %
4 Promoting independence and self-direction in learning					
30 Giving feedback and encouragement to the employee about their work performance	78	18	4	–	100
27 Encouraging employees to share their knowledge and expertise with others (for example, in meetings)	73	17	8	1	99
19 Encouraging the employee to take on more difficult and complex tasks over time	66	27	7	1	101
6 Coming to an agreement with the employee about the types of activities they will do in order to help them learn their job	60	22	17	2	101
31 Encouraging the employee to evaluate their own work performance	55	26	17	3	101
35 Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things	55	29	14	1	99
7 Working out learning goals with the employee	38	27	31	4	100
5 Linking external learning experiences with work and learning within the workplace					
18 Talking to the employee about the difference between how things are done in your workplace and what they might be learning in any off-site training	28	30	30	12	100
17 Reorganising what might be done at work so that it fits more closely with the employee's off-job training	27	27	29	16	99
15 Talking to training providers that are organising off-job training for the employee (for example, employee progress, negotiating alternative assessment tasks, giving feedback)	19	22	47	13	101

* The numbers preceding the actions indicate the order in which they were asked in the telephone interview.

Appendix G: Cross-tabulations of frequencies of trainer actions showing statistical significance

Type of industry

Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total	
		B&C		IT		RE		N	%
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
11. Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them	Very often	89	78	75	60	69	65	233	68
	Sometimes	23	20	33	26	21	20	77	22
	Hardly at all	2	2	17	14	16	15	35	10
Total		114	100	125	100	106	100	345	100

$\chi 2 = 16.43$; df = 4; $p = 0.002$

Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total
		B&C		IT		RE		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
12. Asking other workers to help the employee to learn different aspects of the job	Very often	77	70	61	50	62	61	200
	Sometimes	20		43		26		89
	Hardly at all	13		18		13		44
Total		110		122		101		333

$\chi 2 = 10.64$; df = 4; $p = 0.031$

Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total
		B&C		IT		RE		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
22. Managing the flow of work so that it helps the employee to learn what has to be done	Very often	94	84	83	67	72	69	249
	Sometimes	11		26		21		58
	Hardly at all	7		15		12		34
Total		112		124		105		341

$\chi 2 = 10.18$; df = 4; $p = 0.038$

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Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total
		B&C		IT		RE		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
34. Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of work tasks	Very often	89	79	70	57	68	66	227
	Sometimes	18		37		24		79
	Hardly at all	6		16		11		33
Total		113		123		103		339

$\chi 2 = 13.00$; df = 4; $p = 0.011$

Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total
		B&C		IT		RE		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
13. Organising work so that the employee can spend time watching other workers, asking questions etc.	Very often	43	40	40	33	50	51	133
	Sometimes	27		44		19		90
	Hardly at all	39		38		30		107
Total		109		122		99		330

$\chi 2 = 10.94$; df = 4; $p = 0.027$

Frequency of trainer action		Type of business						Total
		B&C		IT		RE		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
16. Organising resources for the employee (e.g. books, materials, people)	Very often	41	37	62	52	51	52	154
	Sometimes	31		40		28		99
	Hardly at all	39		18		20		77
Total		111		120		99		330

$\chi 2 = 14.71$; df = 4; $p = 0.005$

Size of enterprise

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6–20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
10. Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks	Very often	122	76	66	61	52	65	240
	Sometimes	26		36		23		85
	Hardly at all	13		6		5		24
Total		161		108		80		349

$\chi 2 = 11.55$; df = 4; $p = 0.021$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6–20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
33. Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace	Very often	126	79	69	64	51	64	246
	Sometimes	24		35		25		84
	Hardly at all	10		4		4		18
Total		160		108		80		348

$\chi 2 = 13.81$; df = 4; $p = 0.008$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6–20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
34. Organising work so that the employee is able to tackle a variety of work tasks	Very often	112	71	62	59	53	70	227
	Sometimes	27		36		16		79
	Hardly at all	18		8		7		33
Total		157		106		76		339

$\chi 2 = 10.54$; df = 4; $p = 0.032$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6–20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
28. Taking opportunities that arise during the day (such as at lunchtime, when driving from job to job) to talk with the employee about their job	Very often	90	59	55	54	28	37	173
	Sometimes	34		23		26		83
	Hardly at all	29		24		21		74
Total		153		102		75		330

$\chi 2 = 9.91$; df = 4; $p = 0.042$

Type of industry and size of enterprise

Building and construction

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6-20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
10. Doing a job with an employee so that you can help them with the tasks	Very often	43	80	24	67	15	58	82
	Sometimes	5		11		8		24
	Hardly at all	6		1		3		10
Total		54		36		26		116

$\chi 2 = 9.77$; df = 4; $p = 0.045$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees						Total
		<6		6-20		>20		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
20. Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing	Very often	52	96	33	92	20	77	105
	Sometimes	2		3		3		8
	Hardly at all					3		3
Total		54		36		26		116

$\chi 2 = 12.84$; df = 4; $p = 0.012$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6-20	>20	
23. Making judgements about how fast or slow the pace of work needs to be so that the employee can keep up	Very often	27	27	20	74
	Sometimes	16	4	2	22
	Hardly at all	9	3	3	15
Total		52	34	25	111

$\chi 2 = 10.36$; df = 4; $p = 0.035$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6-20	>20	
29. Making connections between seemingly unconnected events so that the employee can use their learning in new or different situations	Very often	24	9	12	45
	Sometimes	13	19	10	42
	Hardly at all	13	7	2	22
Total		50	35	24	109

$\chi 2 = 9.91$; df = 4; $p = 0.042$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
30. Giving feedback and encouragement to the employee about their work performance	Very often	47	22	23	92
	Sometimes	5	13	2	20
	Hardly at all	2	1		3
Total		54	36	25	115

$\chi 2 = 13.87$; df = 4; $p = 0.008$

Real estate

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
27. Encouraging employees to share their knowledge and expertise with others (e.g. in meetings)	Very often	37	35	11	83
	Sometimes	12	1	4	17
	Hardly at all	4		3	7
Total		53	36	18	107

$\chi 2 = 13.96$; df = 4; $p = 0.007$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
25. Monitoring the work flow and the quality of the employee's work	Very often	33	29	17	79
	Sometimes	15	3	1	19
	Hardly at all	5	2		7
Total		53	34	18	105

$\chi 2 = 10.60$; df = 4; $p = 0.031$

Information technology

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
36. Learning about new ideas, products, processes from the employee	Very often	35	17	12	64
	Sometimes	16	12	14	42
	Hardly at all	3	7	9	19
Total		54	36	35	125

$\chi 2 = 10.98$; df = 4; $p = 0.027$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
35. Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things	Very often	38	19	15	72
	Sometimes	14	10	13	37
	Hardly at all	2	7	7	16
Total		54	36	35	125

$\chi 2 = 10.10$; df = 4; $p = 0.039$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
Helping the employee to work out problems that occur in the workplace	Very often	44	19	18	81
	Sometimes	6	15	17	38
	Hardly at all	3	2	1	6
Total		53	36	36	125

$\chi 2 = 16.37$; df = 4; $p = 0.003$

Frequency of trainer action		Number of employees			Total
		<6	6–20	>20	
24. Making judgements about how to balance the needs of the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done	Very often	38	22	17	77
	Sometimes	15	11	11	37
	Hardly at all	1	3	7	11
Total		54	36	35	125

$\chi 2 = 9.71$; df = 4; $p = 0.046$

Ownership of the business

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
11. Planning the structure of work so that the employee is able to join in and work at a level that is best for them	Very often	115	117	232
	Sometimes	26	51	77
	Hardly at all	13	22	35
Total		154	190	344

$\chi 2 = 6.76$; df = 2; $p = 0.034$

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Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
14. Organising work so that the employee can be given tasks they can tackle on their own	Very often	134	131	265
	Sometimes	14	43	57
	Hardly at all	7	15	22
Total		155	189	344

$\chi 2 = 14.48$; df = 2; $p = .001$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
25. Monitoring the work flow and the quality of the employee's work	Very often	133	141	274
	Sometimes	16	29	45
	Hardly at all	6	18	24
Total		155	188	343

$\chi 2 = 6.88$; df = 2; $p = 0.032$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
5. Talking with an employee to work out what they do and do not know about aspects of their job	Very often	112	104	216
	Sometimes	28	43	71
	Hardly at all	16	45	61
Total		156	192	348

$\chi 2 = 13.67$; df = 2; $p = 0.001$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
6. Coming to an agreement with the employee about the types of activities they will do in order to help them learn their job	Very often	103	105	208
	Sometimes	22	53	75
	Hardly at all	27	33	60
Total		152	191	343

$\chi 2 = 9.12$; df = 2; $p = 0.010$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
7. Working out learning goals with the employee	Very often	72	61	133
	Sometimes	38	55	93
	Hardly at all	37	71	108
Total		147	187	334

$\chi 2 = 10.08$; df = 2; $p = 0.006$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
20. Talking to the employee as you work with them about what they are doing	Very often	146	160	306
	Sometimes	8	25	33
	Hardly at all	2	8	10
Total		156	193	349

$\chi 2 = 9.18$; df = 2; $p = 0.010$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
21. Making time to talk to the employee about their work	Very often	131	129	260
	Sometimes	21	51	72
	Hardly at all	4	13	17
Total		156	193	349

$\chi 2 = 13.51$; df = 2; $p = .001$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
26. Correcting the employee's mistakes	Very often	94	108	202
	Sometimes	30	57	87
	Hardly at all	31	25	56
Total		155	190	345

$\chi 2 = 6.51$; df = 2; $p = 0.039$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
31. Encouraging the employee to evaluate their own work performance	Very often	101	91	192
	Sometimes	32	57	89
	Hardly at all	19	39	58
Total		152	187	339

$\chi 2 = 10.94$; df = 2; $p = 0.004$

Frequency of trainer action		Are you the owner of the business?		Total
		Yes	No	
35. Challenging the employee to explore new or alternate ways of doing things	Very often	98	95	193
	Sometimes	36	63	99
	Hardly at all	20	32	52
Total		154	190	344

$\chi 2 = 6.48$; df = 2; $p = 0.039$

Length of experience

Frequency of trainer action		Experience (categories)						Total
		<6 years		6–20 years		>20 years		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
13. Organising work so that the employee can spend time watching other workers, asking questions etc.	Very often	46	42	50	33	33	53	129
	Sometimes	33		49		7		89
	Hardly at all	31		53		22		106
Total		110		152		62		324

$\chi 2 = 13.21$; df = 4; $p = 0.010$

Frequency of trainer action		Experience (categories)						Total
		<6 years		6–20 years		>20 years		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
24. Making judgements about how to balance the needs of the employee to learn the job and the need to get the job done	Very often	66	58	105	67	49	75	220
	Sometimes	37		34		8		79
	Hardly at all	11		18		8		37
Total		114		157		65		336

$\chi 2 = 9.92$; df = 4; $p = 0.042$

Appendix H: Critical analysis of the unit, 'Train small groups'

The following analysis indicates the assumptions and points of potential confusion implicit in the unit of competency, 'Train small groups', within the training package for Assessment and Workplace Training (1999)

Element	Performance criteria (PC)	Assumptions implicit in the competency standards
1. Prepare for training	1.1 Specific needs for training are identified and confirmed through consultation with appropriate personnel	1.1.1 Specific needs must be identified 1.1.2 Needs are to be identified by other than the learner, most likely the trainer (NB: the second range of variable (RV2) does acknowledge that confirmation may be with the learner)
	1.2 Training objectives are matched to identified competency development needs	1.2.1 Training objectives must be identified and specified, as they have to be matched with competency development needs
	1.3 Training approaches are planned and documented	1.3.1 Planning and documenting are necessary 1.3.2 It is the trainer who does the planning and documenting—wisdom comes from top-down. There is no indication that such planning is to involve the learner (though this may be implied in PC2.4) 1.3.2 There is time and space to 'prepare', 'plan' and 'document'
2. Deliver training	2.1 Training is conducted in a safe and accessible environment	
	2.2 Training delivery methods are selected appropriate to training participants' needs, trainer availability, location and resources	2.2.1 Training is to be 'delivered' 2.2.2 There is time, space and knowledge of training alternatives to be able to select 'appropriate' methods 2.2.3 Selection can be influenced by trainer availability, location and resources
	2.3 Strategies and techniques are employed which facilitate the learning process	2.3.1 There is sufficient knowledge about different 'strategies and techniques' (defined in RV8) and 'the learning process' for such choices to be made 2.3.2 There is one 'learning process' (not defined in the variables)

Element	Performance criteria (PC)	Assumptions implicit in the competency standards
	2.4 Objectives of the training, sequence of activities and assessment processes are discussed with training participants	2.4.1 Time and space are available to discuss these matters with training participants 2.4.2 Assessment is an integral component of the process
	2.5 A systematic approach is taken to training and the approach is revised and modified to meet specific needs of training participants	2.5.1 The ideal/desirable form of workplace training is 'systematic' 2.5.2 The trainer knows what a 'systematic approach' is 2.5.3 The trainer knows alternative 'approaches' that may be less than 'systematic' and are still capable of meeting participant needs 2.5.4 Training in the organisation is able to be planned and implemented in a 'systematic' way, and these planned arrangements are able to be 'revised and modified' during the delivery process on the basis of participants' needs 2.5.5 'Needs' here (or perhaps in PC3.2) may be confused with 'characteristics' of participants (which are defined in RV5) 2.5.6 Participants are able to articulate their 'specific needs'
3 Provide opportunities for practice	3.1 Practice opportunities are provided to ensure that the participant achieves the components of competency	3.1.1 Time and circumstances are available for 'practice' until 'components of competency' are 'achieved'
	3.2 Various methods for encouraging learning are implemented to provide diverse approaches to meet the individual needs of participants	3.2.1 A difficult PC to understand—the words 'to provide diverse approaches' could be omitted 3.2.2 'Needs' here (or in PC2.5) may be confused with 'characteristics' of participants (defined in RV5)
4 Review training	4.1 Participants are encouraged to self-evaluate performance and identify areas for improvement	4.1.1 Participants know how to 'self-evaluate performance' and 'identify areas for improvement'

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Element	Performance criteria (PC)	Assumptions implicit in the competency standards
	4.2 Participants' readiness for assessment is monitored and assistance provided in the collection of evidence of satisfactory performance	4.2.1 Assessment always takes place 4.2.2 There is a common understanding of what 'satisfactory performance' means 4.2.3 There is a common understanding of what evidence needs to be collected to reflect this level of performance
	4.3 Training is evaluated in the context of self-assessment, participant feedback, supervisor comments and measurements against objectives	4.3.1 Evaluation of training always takes place 4.3.2 Evaluation must involve supervisors and their comments 4.3.3 The evaluation model is of one type—that which focusses on measurement against objectives 4.3.4 Feedback must always be sought by the trainer from the participant
	4.4 Training details are recorded according to enterprise and legislative requirements	4.4.1 'Training details' are of the type that can be 'recorded' 4.4.2 Participants are always content to have such 'details' recorded within their enterprise 4.4.3 These 'training details' always need to be 'recorded'
	4.5 Results of evaluation are used to guide further training	4.5.1 Evaluation of training has been undertaken and recorded in the form of 'results' 4.5.2 The trainer is always able to, and does, access such 'results of evaluation' before engaging in 'further training' 4.5.3 The trainer always uses these results to 'guide' any further training

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Notes on the eight range of variables (RV)

1 *Relevant information to identify training needs includes* ... (refers to PC1.1)

- the sources of information are very formal
- individual employee request for help is not included

2 *Appropriate personnel may include* ... (refers to PC1.1)

- 'training participants' are included—this is consistent with more informal notions of training

3 *Training delivery methods and opportunities for practice may include* ... (refers to two PCs)

- 'mentoring' and 'on-the-job coaching' are mentioned—this is consistent with more informal notions of training
- note that this list refers *both* to 'training delivery methods' in Criterion 2.2 *and* to 'practice opportunities' in Criterion 3.1

4 *Components of competency include* ... (refers to PC3.1)

- okay (these are the components defined by the former National Training Board in the early 1990s)

5 *Characteristics of training participant may include information in relation to* ... (does not refer to anything)

- there is no mention of the word 'characteristics' anywhere in the competency standards
- there is therefore confusion between 'characteristics' and 'needs'. Needs are mentioned three times: in PC2.2 (where delivery methods are to be selected 'appropriate to participants' needs'; in PC2.5 (where training approach is to be revised and modified 'to meet specific needs of training participants'; and in PC3.2 (where diverse approaches are to be provided 'to meet the individual needs of participants')

6 *Training sessions may include* ... (does not refer to anything)

- there is no mention of the word 'sessions' anywhere in the competency standards. Is this meant to refer to 'activities' in PC2.4?
- 'sessions' implies a degree of formality and may imply groups
- the assumption is that training can only be by 'demonstration'. It is feasible that such training sessions might involve methods other than just demonstrations, for example, explanation, discussion, observation, problem-solving, presentation

7 *Resources may include* ... (refers to PC2.2)

- time, human, physical and financial resources are mentioned—this is consistent with more informal notions of training
- 'location' could be spelt out—on the job, off the job, other contexts, combinations?

8 *Strategies and techniques may include* ... (refers to PC2.3)

- these are evidently meant to be different from 'delivery methods' listed in RV3. Yet is 'points of clarification' different from 'explanations' in RV3? 'Group discussions' may be a sub-part of 'group work' in RV3? (Is it in the same category as the other three?). Is this list complete?

Note that there is no range of variables for the fourth element, 'Review training'. Ways of monitoring 'readiness for assessment' and types of 'evidence of satisfactory performance' may warrant examples.

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